

**CALLED TO BE MULTICULTURAL:  
NEW TESTAMENT AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PERSPECTIVES  
TO DEVELOP MULTICULTURAL CHURCHES**

**A Professional Project**

**presented to**

**the Faculty of the**

**Claremont School of Theology**

**In Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Doctor of Ministry**

**by**

**Brian Timothy Parcel**

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*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the  
Claremont School of Theology in partial fulfillment  
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**DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Called to be Multicultural:**

**New Testament and Religious Education Perspectives to Develop Multicultural Churches**

**by**

**Brian Timothy Parcel**

**This project deals with the problem that some United Methodist Churches in multicultural neighborhoods in Southern California are remaining mono-cultural while the neighborhoods around them are becoming increasingly multicultural. This leaves the Church as the sole segregated institution in a community, which is contrary to the theological heritage of the New Testament. This ethic of ministry sends an implicit message that the Church can never be the center of the community. This message is devastating to communities that desperately need a common ground and devastating to the Church in areas of the country, like Southern California, which are growing more and more multicultural. Construction of the Church in this way has rendered the Church to the boundary of these neighborhoods rather than to the center of the neighborhood where it is called to be. The Church becomes an institution that separates and divides the community and eventually will become obsolete in this setting.**

**This project relies heavily on a liberation theology model of praxis for developing perspectives that can be employed in the development of a multicultural Church. The first movement of the perspective is exegesis. There are three levels of exegesis, or understandings, to be gained: biblical/theological, about the Church itself, and about the community. These understandings build the foundation upon which the multicultural**

**Church will be developed. The second movement of the perspective is reflection.**

**Critical reflection is applied to all three levels of exegesis, developing a mass of critical understanding of self and community from which to act. The third movement of the perspective is action. As in liberation theology, praxis is a combination of reflection and action, and this project demonstrates how the first two movements can lead to transformative action within the Church.**

**These movements of religious education give a perspective through which to view the biblical proclamation, ourselves and our communities. This perspective allows for us to re-vision the ministry of the Church in such a way that individual diversity can be celebrated and at the same time the Church can be the center of any community.**

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**For my nephews, Dylan and Brayden, and all the “Marias” out there.**

**May you find hope and a future in the Church of Jesus Christ.**

## CHAPTER 1

### The Story, the Reality and the Problem

This story could be about your child, the child of your neighbor, or a child in most urban centers throughout the United States. The child could be an Hispanic American named Maria, an African American named Tyrone, a Korean American named Sung, an Anglo American named Sarah, or any of the other ethnic groups represented in the United States. For this illustration we will take the name Maria. Maria lives in a small neighborhood nestled into the background of the city with her parents and two siblings. The neighborhood is one of the many that change ethnicity and socio/economic status so quickly that even the demographers cannot figure out who lives there.

Monday through Friday Maria goes through the same routine. Her father awakes her as the house quickly flies into motion. Kids and parents bustle around getting ready for school and work, attempting to get themselves ready and stay out of the way of the others. There is a bit of a rest when any four of the five happen to the breakfast table at the same time for cereal, toast, juice and a cup of coffee if your are old enough, Maria is not. Every morning ends the same, hurried goodbyes all around as dad rushes off to the work truck and mom walks the kids down to the corner for the ten minute bus ride to school before she heads to work herself. At the bus stop, Maria does her best not to stand too close to her brother and sister because she is a fifth grader and they are only first and third graders and what big sister wants to be seen with her little brother and sister. This is usually easier when Sarah, Maria's best friend, rides the bus because then at least Maria

has someone to talk to. Sarah does not ride the bus though on Thursdays because her parents are divorced and she stays at her dad's Wednesday nights and he always drives her to school on Thursdays.

On the bus Maria and Sarah, except on Thursdays, get to sit in the back with the other fifth graders. There they meet up with other friends and chat all the way to school: beginning to dream about boys, complaining about the report that is due Friday about a U.S. President, and watching out the window for the car they will drive when they get old. When the bus finally gets to school all the kids rush off as the bells sound ushering them to class. Maria is in Mr. Andebe's class. He is a stout man with very, very black skin and a deep voice. Maria used to think that he sounded funny the way he talked, but he said he was from some place in Africa, Kenya she thinks, and slowly by the second month of school he did not sound funny at all. He just sounded like Mr. Andebe.

In class Maria sits behind Brad, whom Mr. Andebe sometimes calls Bradley when he won't stop talking, Bradley that is. Brad is funny and Maria likes him because he is always turning around in math to get the answers and this makes Maria feel smart. Maria always wondered two things about Brad, why his hair always looked like he just woke up and what that big brown spot was just behind his left ear. Maria never asked Brad about his hair because she got in trouble by her mom one time for asking her aunt the same question, but she did ask him about that big brown spot just behind his left ear. It was not really like a freckle, Sarah had freckles and this was much bigger, though it could have been a giant freckle. When Maria asked Brad about the big brown spot just behind his left ear, Brad covered it up with his hand and said it was his birth mark as he turned away so even if he wasn't covering the big brown spot with his hand she would not have been

able to see it. Maria felt sad because all during math class that day Brad never once turned around to talk to her and she really thought that the big brown spot was okay anyways – after all, it was the same color as all of her skin. She wondered if all white people had birthmarks and one time she even secretly peeked behind Sarah’s left ear but she did not have a big brown spot there. Maybe it was just Brad.

Maria likes school and the classroom stuff and all that, but Maria really likes recess. At recess, after they eat their lunches, Maria and her friends can be found playing foursquare, swinging on the bars, and now that they are in the fifth grade they can be found wondering over towards the soccer field or basketball courts where the boys are. If you could stand on the roof of the school and watch the kids you would see a tapestry of sizes, shapes and colors and hear the drone of various accents mixing together with an occasional foul word blurted out in a native tongue so as to not get in trouble. At this particular school you would see a few more Mexicans (Maria’s mom always corrects her with a bit of frustration in her voice, saying, “We are not Mexican, we are El Salvadoran.” But, either is okay with Maria), next you would see Anglo Americans then African Americans and then Asian and then a few from the Pacific Islands, the Middle East and India. Of course, there would also be those kids who seemed to bare the features of two or three of these ethnic groups mixed together – because they do.

The same tapestry can be seen amidst the kids at the after school program which Maria gets to go to because she is in the fifth grade, it is the same at her brother’s cub scout troop, at her soccer games, at the local grocery store, at the P.T.A., and in the streets riding scooters and jumping rope. It never occurred to Maria that this tapestry might be out of place. This is the way it had always been, at least since the first grade

when she moved to this school and her family moved into their house. It never once occurred to her, even when there were fights on the playground, because the fights were always about who's ball it was, or who won the game, or who was whose best friend, or who told on who and the fights always divided down the middle of who was right and who was wrong, and that line was always color blind. It did not occur to her at her ninth birthday party last summer in the park when all her friends were invited and they played all day long in the bounce house together and then all the girls got to stay the night. The tapestry could be seen in the bounce house, in the parents' conversations as they dropped off and picked up kids, and in the early morning hours as the girls fell asleep in one big pile on top of one another exhausted from being little girls. It never occurred to her that the tapestry might be out of place.

Maria loved Saturdays; this was the only day she got to sleep late during the entire year. On Sundays she had to get up even earlier than on school days and go through the hassle of mom fussing over her dress and then the long (thirty minutes can seem like an eternity on Sunday morning) ride to church. Sure church is fun once she gets there, but Maria is not much of a morning person. Big church can be a little boring sometimes especially when the Pastor talks forever and ever, but the music is okay even the songs in Spanish that her dad tries to make her learn at the dinner table. Sunday school is a blast and Maria is going to grow up to be just like Mrs. Silva someday, and Maria really likes her church friends too.

Maria was thinking about this one day on the way home from church – her church friends and her other friends that is, very few of which are counted in both groups. Maria did not know it, but in this single thought the place of the tapestry was coming into doubt.

The thought that if church was what was right and good, then it must be right and good for everyone to look just like her. The tapestry which had never occurred to her before was suddenly torn apart. Maria was quiet on the ride home and finally her dad asked her if everything was okay and she said yes and smiled at him the rear view mirror. Really she wanted to ask a question but she was afraid that she might get in trouble for asking. So she just smiled again and thought up the question in her own mind.

How come I can sit with Sarah on the bus everyday except Thursday of course, and can help Brad with his math everyday except when I make him mad asking about the big brown spot behind his left ear, and can get in trouble with Sung for picking all of Mrs. Gertrude's pretty baby pink roses, and Tyrone and his sisters can come to my birthday party in the park in the summer and his sisters can even stay the night and tell ghost stories and Mr. Andebe can be my fifth grade teacher, even though I used to think he talked funny, but none of these people can go to church with us and I don't get to go to church with them?

It was a good question that Maria thought of, but she just smiled again at her dad in the mirror and did not ask it, she did not want to get in trouble on Sunday.

Maria has a problem; she lives in a world where she can do everything in life with people of many cultures and backgrounds, except go to church. This is not just Maria's problem this is the Church's problem when it sends this message to the next generation of Christians and non-Christians. This is the Church's problem when there is an old dying Anglo congregation exhausting their bodies with the upkeep of their big beautiful building and exhausting their budgets supporting the ministry with a handful of members, while in the same small town across the way there is a Hispanic congregation of the same denomination overflowing their decrepit building, and the solution is never to join together and share resources and fellowship. This is the Church's problem when there is an African American congregation in the midst of what was once 'their' neighborhood

but now has changed into a Hispanic neighborhood and all of the African American members drive miles and miles for Sunday worship and none of the Hispanic families feel welcome to walk across the street and join them. This is the Church's problem when there is an elderly struggling Anglo congregation set in their ways amidst a multicultural neighborhood and the best response the Anglo congregation can muster is, 'I don't know why don't they like us,' despite the fact that the neighbors have never really been invited in. This is the Church's problem when there are fights between the Korean American congregation, which speaks Korean, renting space from the English speaking Anglo congregation over what time to hold the new English speaking Korean service. Maria and all the children of her generation have a problem when the Church separates the Body of Christ along the most noticeable lines of ethnicity and culture.

### **The Problem**

This project is about the problem faced here by Maria, and though she is a mythical child there are many children like her in Southern California who may be faced with the same question she is asking if we do not consider how to be a multicultural Church. Some United Methodist Churches (hereafter UMC) in multicultural neighborhoods in Southern California are remaining mono-cultural while the neighborhoods around them are becoming increasingly multicultural. This leaves the church as the sole segregated institution in a community, which is contrary to the theological heritage of the New Testament.

In the past, and certainly in some circumstances today, explicitly ethnic ministries are the best options for ministry to various groups. However, as Southern California continues to grow more multicultural it is time for a new strategy of church development.

When combined, the decades of 1980 and 1990 produced the largest influx of immigrants in any twenty-year period the United States has experienced.<sup>1</sup> Studies of this population show that these immigrants are not Anglos and that the Anglo population is remaining relatively stable.<sup>2</sup> By the year 2050 if these two trends continue the non-Anglo and the Anglo populations will nearly equal one another.<sup>3</sup> Mike Regele asserts that the church is being left behind by the change in neighborhoods that is being created with these ethnic changes in the population. In other words, the churches located in “changing” neighborhoods are not changing with the neighborhood and therefore will die as their Anglo members die.<sup>4</sup> •

These types of neighborhoods are not only becoming more popular because of immigration, but they are also becoming more numerous because of economic necessity. The gap between the rich and poor is increasing in our nation indiscriminant of race or ethnicity. This has two important results in relation to growing multiculturalism. First, the rich are not just from one ethnic group anymore and able to live secluded from other groups, but now the wealthy neighborhoods can be multicultural. Second, the mass of poor is increasing and there is less ability to choose one’s living space according to various factors such as race, leaving one to choose for affordability. Socio/economics becomes more of a factor than race in the division of groups in our culture. If this is the case then it no longer makes sense to construct ministry on the basis of ethnicity if the surrounding community is not divided by ethnicity.

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Regele with Mark Schulz, Death of the Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 104.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 106.



These factors have made some neighborhoods and their corresponding community institutions like schools, community centers, parks, recreation leagues, businesses, and government agencies, multicultural. However, the current strategy for ministry in the local church is still to divide along ethnic lines in an effort to uphold the ethnic identity of each group. The result is that the Church sends the message that the only institution in a neighborhood that cannot be integrated is the Church. The community is not invited to be a part of the Church unless they reflect the ethnic identity of the established congregation. They are instead invited to drive out of the neighborhood to the nearest ethnic ministry that appeals to them or to become a member of the local ethnic ministry renting from the lead church.

This transformation is not easily made because of the way the Church has operated for the last two decades. The Church has finally responded to centuries of Anglo dominance with a movement to uplift ethnic groups. We have chosen to do this by giving sole space to ethnic groups maintaining an effective separation between the groups. This was effective and important ministry and still could be in certain places, especially to new immigrants without dominant language skills. At times we will discover that mono-cultural ministry is still important, life giving and necessary.

However, during this time of emphasizing cultural identity and difference we have forgotten that the theological heritage we trace back to the New Testament and the early Church gives us clear directives for discovering our common existence in Christ as opposed to our differences from one another. Some New Testament and early Church communities developed in an increasingly multicultural context due to the fact that the Roman government was overtaking many other cultures and the synthesis of cultures was

becoming acceptable. In addition, travel was becoming easier, safer and more accepted between regions which increased the probability that cultures would meet and meld with one another. The new understanding of God was of a larger more benevolent deity than before, who could not be contained in a temple and owned by a particular group but was available to all humanity. This is our true theological heritage that led some groups of early Christians to an understanding of their common existence in Christ that crossed all boundaries.<sup>5</sup>

The church's model for establishing ministries during the last 20 years is to begin with an ethnic group and design the church with that group in mind: the education, the worship, the leadership, etc. This immediately eliminates the possibility of a multicultural existence for the church because it was constructed given our difference rather than our common existence. In doing this we have rendered the church to the boundary of that neighborhood rather than to the center of the neighborhood where it is called to be and the church fails to be a place of gathering and sharing of life for the neighborhood. It becomes an institution that separates and divides a community and eventually will become obsolete in this setting.

We must reverse the trend of growing obsolescence in United Methodist Churches located in multicultural neighborhoods in Southern California by looking to the early Church's presentation of an understanding of God and the Church which gives us a common existence in Jesus Christ. Then we must construct models of the Church based on this understanding rather than on our attempts to affirm cultural identity.

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<sup>5</sup> The ideas from this paragraph are influenced by Professor Gregory J. Riley, especially from his course "Spirituality and Worship in the New Testament," Claremont School of Theology, Fall 2000.

### Definitions of Terms

Multiculturalism is a widely discussed topic today in both academia and popular culture. Throughout the body of work dealing with the topic, language is used in many different ways with variable meanings and intentions sometimes given to the same word by different authors. Due to this, it is necessary in order for the current discussion to continue, that terms be defined and meanings clarified.

*Multicultural:* This is the key term to be defined in this work and it is important for this project and for the Church to understand the fullness of this term. Oftentimes, multicultural is used in reference to ethnic and racial groups; this project however, seeks to use a fuller understanding of the term. Used here, multicultural will refer to ways which groups can be distinguished from one another, for example: ethnic, racial, language, generation, gender and socio/economics. In her attempt to define this term, Barbara Wilkerson, concedes that this fuller understanding “creates a definition so broad as to be beyond the scope of this volume [Multicultural Religious Education].”<sup>6</sup> I am in complete agreement with Wilkerson that this definition creates new problems when dealing with this issue; however, as this thesis progresses it will become evident why we must go beyond the racial and ethnic understanding.

*Mono-cultural:* Will be used to address the antonym of multicultural above. A mono-cultural ministry or understanding is only addressing one particular cultural issue, most commonly ethnicity or language. However, there are many mono-cultural institutions in our society that only reach certain socio/economic groups or are only addressing certain levels of education, etc.

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<sup>6</sup> Barbara Wilkerson, ed., introduction to Multicultural Religious Education (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1997), 2.

***Ethnic ministries:*** Ministries that are initiated specifically to address a particular ethnic group. These are often begun as regional ministries designed to reach out to ethnic minorities in a particular region, the Pomona Inland Valley for example, as opposed to reaching a particular neighborhood. These ministries are often based in the first language of the ethnic group as opposed to a second language, most often English.

***Church Development:*** This term will be used in a larger meaning than just the physical location of a religious community. Church development here is referring to the construction of a community of believers in a particular context. It is referring specifically to the local community and not the larger idea of Christendom.

***Early Church:*** This reference is to the context of Christianity in the first and second century C.E., which encompasses the New Testament and extends beyond the corpus of the New Testament. This will include non-canonical writings such as Gnostic writings, the Didache, writings from church leaders, politicians and philosophers whom influenced culture in the first and second century.

***Religious Education:*** This term will be understood as going beyond the traditional forms of education that we utilize in the church, such as Bible study and Sunday school. It will refer to a holistic approach to teaching and understanding what the purpose of the Church is in a given community. This education is done through every aspect of Church life: the finances, the meetings, the traditional education, the worship, the fellowship, the service, etc. All of spiritual life will be seen in service of religious education, even if it is not explicitly a traditional teaching method. Everything we do can

be utilized to teach us about God, our relationship to God and our relationship to the rest of creation.<sup>7</sup>

*Ethnicity and Race:* It is important that we differentiate between these two commonly used phrases, which are often used interchangeably. This project will understand a difference between the two terms as they are defined in Webster's Dictionary.<sup>8</sup> When used "ethnic" is referring to a group of people bound together by a common racial, national, religious, linguistic, tribal, or cultural norm. "Race" refers to a group of people belonging to the same "stock." For example, Jews, who are Anglo, belong to the Caucasian race and Jewish ethnic group. For the purpose of this paper these terms are important because they are two more ways that we define ourselves. I discovered one example of how a particular community differentiated itself based on these definitions while serving a church in a southern state. The community was divided by race, black and white, but then there were those who shared both races, referred to as mulattos and though they were of both races they were seen as a separate ethnic group and therefore divided off from the other two.

### Work Previously Done in the Field

A study of work previously done in the multicultural religious education field may best be understood through the following anecdote: In a seminary course titled, "Multicultural Religious Education," a bibliography was made available to students for

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<sup>7</sup> The field of Religious Education is diverse in self-definition. A very good overview is presented by Mary C. Boys in which she explores the historical dimensions and movements of religious education in the modern era and presents numerous models for her readers. Educating in Faith: Maps and Visions (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989). Another good treatment of this subject is developed by Parker Palmer in which he questions some of the traditional models and presents new pedagogical and epistemological insights. To Know as We are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, s.v. "ethnicity" and "race."

further study and the bibliography was separated into five different categories: African-American, Asian American, Latino/a, Native American and Pacific Islander Resources.<sup>9</sup> The course was more about understanding how different cultures utilize religious education than how we can develop a religious education model for multiple cultures to utilize. In a publication presenting the work of the students, Multicultural Models for Religious Education, the majority of models presented were models specifically designed to engage one particular group of people, not to engage across boundaries of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. The majority of authors presented here are from minority backgrounds. In order to have their perspectives heard they must advocate for a very culturally centric perspective.

In the midst of Christian history the dominant perspective has too often left out the minority experiences of spirituality. The result of all this is neither dominant nor minority religious educators can or are able to develop multicultural perspectives. This anecdote is not given as a critique of the course, the professor or the students. It demonstrates the difficulty in finding previous work and producing our own work that explicitly attempts to bridge religious education across cultures without being colonizers of other cultures. The history of the Church has been one to say that it is open to all peoples and cultures; however, we know this is a false statement. The dominant groups in the Church have established orthodoxy and ortho-praxis and forced outsiders to conform or be banished. They have done this while claiming inclusion and community but have actually been practicing colonization by forcing people to conform to the dominant traditions over and against their indigenous practices.

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, "Multicultural Religious Education," course taught at Claremont School of Theology, Fall 2000.

Though few, there are some works in the religious education field that deal with the issue of multiculturalism as this project attempts to. Barbara Wilkerson writes the first chapter in a book that she edited called, Multicultural Religious Education, giving a very good synthesis and critique of work already done and then proposing a number of goals and approaches for doing multicultural religious education.<sup>10</sup> Other essays in the volume deal with issues from perspectives of social, psychological, biblical and theological foundations. There are also essays concerning curriculum and pedagogy for. This is the best work discovered to date that deals explicitly with multicultural religious education with a goal of educating across cultures.

Though he is not explicitly addressing multicultural religious education, Eric Law in his book, The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, offers biblical and theological understandings that may prove valuable for this thesis. His discussion is about the patterns of spiritual leadership in the Church but his image of living out the Gospel can be applied to all in the Church. He uses the image of death and resurrection as starting points for entering dialogue, with the powerful needing to enter into death, giving up power, and the oppressed entering into the resurrection, taking hold of power that was never before offered.<sup>11</sup> This is not a one-movement entrance, but rather a cycle according to Law and a community continually cycles through receiving and giving power.<sup>12</sup> This image will be helpful in the analysis of how one overcomes the previous power structures in order to begin the process of multicultural religious education.

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<sup>10</sup> Wilkerson, "Goals of Multicultural Religious Education," 11-55.

<sup>11</sup> Eric H. F. Law, The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), 73-75.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid..

There are also works in theological disciplines that provide some insight into the multicultural Church issue as well. One such work is that of Letty Russell, Church in the Round. Though Russell would place her social location amidst feminist theologians and does so in the text, her image of the table is another that possibly provides further insight into multicultural religious education issues. She is arguing for a model of the Church to be that of a round table, which she points out has the connotation both of hospitality in numerous cultures and the biblical witness of Jesus inviting all to the table.<sup>13</sup> This invitation to the table and the connections made by those at the table have significance in multicultural religious education, that makes this work part of the corpus of works dealing implicitly with the same multicultural issues as this project.

There are numerous works that deal with cultural issues in the Church, but not necessarily multicultural issues. One example is, Worship Across Cultures, by Kathy Black. The title might lead one to believe that worship is crossing over the boundaries of various cultures. The work Black does, however, in this book outlines worship practices of numerous cultures and lifts up the rich diversity of the many cultures presented. She is not proposing that we should necessarily find a common ground in worship and in a sense she has encountered the same problem that this project is encountering: what do we do when there are multiple cultures represented and one style will not fit for all of the community, is it possible to worship together as a community?<sup>14</sup>

The major contrast to these works that this project seeks to discover is a different starting point for understanding the Church and community. These projects have begun with their cultural assumptions and worked back to the Church and Gospel. There is

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<sup>13</sup> Letty Russell, Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 17-19.

<sup>14</sup> Kathy Black, Worship Across Cultures: A Handbook (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 12.



certain validity in recognizing the influence that our cultural backgrounds create in us when we come to the text or the Church, and this project does not dispute that validity. When the cultural assumptions, however, are our starting point we will remain divided from those who do not share the same cultural inheritances. If our starting point for understanding the Church has us separated from one another it will be very difficult to find our common ground amidst the expressed difference. What this project will do is take us back to the Gospel proclamation of a common existence in Christ. This proclamation, developed through Chapter 2, will be the starting point for thinking about God, the Church and the community. This means that the beginning of the process is the place where there is commonality and as we construct out, certainly we will explore different paths according to our cultural traditions, but the center, the common ground, is already stated so we always remain grounded there.

### Scope and Limitations of the Project

The questions addressed in this project develop out of my experience in two United Methodist Churches in Los Angeles County, one as a Pastoral Intern and one as Pastor. For this reason the conclusions found here will most apply to these two churches. It is necessary to intimately know the congregation and context of a church in order to suggest visions for future ministry; therefore, though the discussion of this project may pertain to other churches located in multicultural neighborhoods, the directives taken here will apply only to these two congregations. Each congregation located in it's own context will have it's own directives towards developing a multicultural church.

Upon understanding this, it is important that we recognize the problem addressed in this project goes beyond these two churches and may be applied to any church that

discovers itself to be amidst a multicultural community. The biblical and theological foundations set forth are specifically meant to be accessible to any church in this setting. While the specific directives for ministry are limited to two congregations the implications for ministry go far beyond these two congregations. The foundation for developing churches, which is implicated here, can be applied to any situation using specific ministry tools, as they are useful in various congregations. While I have experienced the result of not transforming one's ministry to address the problem raised in this project and I fear that other churches will follow this pattern of neglect, this is not an issue isolated to these two congregations. This is a problem that has a much wider scope in our increasingly multicultural world.

#### Procedure for Integration

The project will integrate religious education, described above which is traditionally seen as a practical discipline and the theological discipline of biblical study. By first proposing a theological viewpoint which grows out of biblical study, a starting point will be given from which the practical discipline of religious education can be applied. The project will make the implications of our religious education explicit understandings, so that in practice these two disciplines are integrated in how and why we develop multicultural churches. The why questions will be answered through the biblical study and the how questions will be addressed by religious education. If we agree with the conclusions of the biblical study in this project then our models of religious education must be rethought -- the old models may not hold the same theological or biblical integrity.

A number of methods will be applied throughout this study. Library research of both the biblical and religious education components will be coupled with field research from both congregations studied. The methodology for the study of the congregations will be based on principles of liberation theology. Part of the interaction with the congregations will be an exercise in understanding the community in which the church is located. Liberation theology is interested in understanding the people and the context that we do theology from because theology cannot happen in a vacuum. Michael Mata uses this form of research in his Urban Ministry courses at the Claremont School of Theology and refers to the practice as “exegeting the city.” The overall work of the interviews hopes to utilize and begin the praxis of liberation theology: to understand the situation, reflect socially and theologically upon the situation, and then to act in ways that bring transformation.<sup>15</sup> The actual process of the interviews is very similar to the actual process of multicultural religious education presented in this project and the hope of the process is that through the exegesis the congregations become more aware of who their neighbors are, reflect upon their own experience and the experiences they learn from their neighbors, see common ground, and then act in ways that transform the community to include the previous outsiders.

### Chapter Outline

This introduction gives the reader a brief understanding of the problem and the directions that will be taken to address the problem. Some background information is given detailing how immigration and economics are creating multicultural neighborhoods. The chapter also looks briefly at how the United Methodist Church has

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<sup>15</sup> Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, rev. ed., trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1993), 17-22.

dealt ineffectively with these types of neighborhoods and why it is important for this trend to be reversed if the Church is going to survive.

Chapter 2 will be concerned with developing a Biblical witness of an understanding of God and Church in the multicultural setting of the first and second century. The biblical study will focus on the development of the Christian movement as it grows out of Jerusalem and spreads into neighboring areas. The focus will begin with an examination of the book of Acts as the early leaders of the movement struggle with multiculturalism themselves. We will see how Peter and Paul each encounter other cultures, physically and theologically, and how Paul and his followers begin to develop a new theology as their ministry is primarily in the multicultural context of the Greco/Roman world. This context provides Paul with the motive for thinking in multicultural terms, whereas Peter and the church in Jerusalem are not as challenged. We will also see how Paul and his followers were influenced by the sociological and philosophical changes occurring in the Greco/Roman world. We will also examine how Jesus deals with multiculturalism in two Gospel passages. All of this will provide an understanding of how some early converts began to understand the Christian movement as embracing all people and cultures. This understanding will be the foundation upon which the following chapters are developed.

Chapter 3 will provide further understanding of changing neighborhoods reflecting increased multiculturalism, specifically surrounding two local congregations. This chapter will aid in the development of the problem and necessity of a new model as well as provide particular contextual understandings of the churches and neighborhoods this project is addressing.

Chapter 4 will provide theoretical and practical applications provided the biblical understanding set forth in chapter two. In the chapter current models for religious education and church development will be addressed and a new three-movement model will be presented for developing churches in multicultural contexts. The final chapter will provide some conclusions and reflections that may be utilized in the two congregations studied and made applicable to those searching for new models of religious education in our multicultural world.

The story of Maria, her friends and her question give a context and a picture of the problem facing the Church in these times. It is the goal of this project to provide a sense of hope for those living in multicultural contexts and struggling with the same implicit messages from the Church that Maria struggles with. It is worth repeating that we must reverse the trend of growing obsolescence in United Methodist Churches located in multicultural neighborhoods in Southern California. First, by looking to the early Church's presentation of an understanding of God and Church which gives us a common existence in Jesus Christ. Then we can construct models of the Church based on this understanding rather than on our attempts to affirm cultural diversity.

## CHAPTER 2

### Multiculturalism in the New Testament

One of the myths in the Christian tradition is that Christianity began as a unified movement where everybody agreed with one another. We would like to believe that division within the Church began centuries later as we got farther from New Testament times and only when human passions for power and prestige got in the way of clear thinking. It is true that human passions played a role in the division of the Church but not as late as we might want to believe. The human passions that draw people in different directions from one another were alive before, during and immediately following the life and death of Jesus. An historical perspective shows this in the Jewish tradition as prophets were banished by religious leaders of the Temple, and early Christian churches had disagreements within the ranks of the faithful. This is also one of the primary foci of Paul in his letters to the Corinthians. This chapter deals specifically with one group of Christians who were placed in the multicultural context of the expanding Greco/Roman world and for that reason began to understand Christianity differently than other groups who were in more homogenous Jewish centers such as Jerusalem.

This chapter is a biblical and historical approach to understanding this group, which was largely lead by Paul and his coworkers. The aim of this understanding is to gain an insight into how this group of Christians began to understand that the *people of God* were not restricted to the Jews but in fact the *people of God* were all people. Upon this foundation they began to establish churches that were as multicultural as was the

culture they were living in. Though not all Christian churches of the first and second century CE were, these churches were distinctive because of their multiculturalism.

This project is attempting to outline a model for establishing multicultural churches in our time and places where neighborhoods are shared by many different types of people. This chapter will provide a theological foundation for why it is important for the Church to be multicultural in these settings and not only why it is important, but how it is faithful. If Pauline Christians were faithful in their approach and understanding of God in the first century then for us to establish churches in multicultural communities that exclude any group of people within that community is in fact inherently unfaithful. Unfortunately, due to reactions of an oppressive past history of the Church and a cultural sensitivity to diversity, we have been establishing churches that deny the deep understandings and faithful models of Pauline Christianity. In order for the Church to be a vital institution into the future in Southern California and other regions of the United States that have a multicultural setting, we must reclaim the biblical witness of multiculturalism which the Pauline Christians have given to us.

This chapter will first look at the two different groups to emphasize the sociological settings into which churches were birthed, the Jerusalem Christians and the Pauline Christians. After understanding that though vastly different in approach they were both faithful to their understandings of Jesus' directions to preach the Gospel to the whole world, we will turn our attention to the Pauline community. In the examination of the sociological setting into which the Pauline community took the Gospel it will be clear why they would have reason to think in multicultural models. Then we will look at the new anthropological ideas that the Pauline community was encountering, giving them a

way to think about humanity in dualistic terms helping them redefine their definition of the *people of God*. Finally this chapter will examine the development of new understandings of God and the *people of God* within this multicultural context laying out a theological foundation that the modern day Church can utilize when rethinking ministry in multicultural contexts. This chapter is essentially a bible study utilizing pericopes from the Gospels of Mark and John and a saying from the Epistle to the Galatians. Other writings such as non-canonical texts and historical documents from the first century will also be utilized.

### The Two Movements in Acts

In the beginning of the book of Acts we see that after the death of Jesus the disciples went away perhaps attempting to make sense of all that had occurred. They very well could have been full of questions: ‘What do we do now that Jesus is dead?’ ‘What does all this mean?’ They had been following this man for years and now they are left on their own to continue the message he taught them. The text says that the risen Jesus appeared to them telling them to wait in Jerusalem (1:4). As they waited one of the questions that they had was whether it was time for God to restore the Kingdom of Israel, that shows in part that they had missed the message of Jesus already. The disciples understood that the Kingdom Jesus was referring to was the temporal Kingdom of Israel. They misunderstood that Jesus was teaching that the Kingdom of God was not a temporal kingdom at all but was a spiritual Kingdom, which Jesus tells them is already “among” them (Luke 17:21).<sup>1</sup> The disciples receive a surprising answer to their question in verse 8, “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.



my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8). The message of Jesus is different than what the disciples expected because their initial question was about Israel, which Judea and Samaria can be included in, but what about the ends of the earth? What did Jesus intend by telling the disciples that they would go out beyond Israel with the message? How various groups of disciples interpreted this commission marked the beginning of the division within the Church. From these roots of the movement there are numerous understandings of the purpose and mission of the Church, in fact before the Church was ever founded. In essence it is the same issue that the Church is struggling with today as we try to understand how to be in ministry to the entire world.

Later in Acts the writer recounts this division. Peter led the initial reactions of the disciples to this commission in and around Jerusalem, and was very successful in doing so. So many people became followers that in chapter 6 the writer tells us, seven more had to be chosen to serve because there were not enough servants to care for the entire community (1-7). Another sign that the Christian community was growing was the anger of the council leaders against the Christian leaders and the persecution that followed. As the Christian community grew the high priests of the traditional Jewish community became enraged and threatened. The only reason for this reaction from the high priests would be if people were listening and responding favorably to the message of the Christians otherwise the high priests could have just ignored this rouge group of Jews, but that was not the case.

Gradually the message begins to ripple out from Jerusalem. In the eighth chapter of Acts, the ministry of Phillip to Samaria, north of Jerusalem, is recounted in which

Samaritans accept the teachings of Philip and the Christian community grows there (8:4-13). This is still in the traditional Kingdom territory of Israel but is removed from Jerusalem. The leaders in Jerusalem still have control over the ministry through sending Peter and John to Samaria in order to authenticate the converts through the laying on of hands (8:14-25). The movement is spreading but the center remains Jerusalem. Later in the same chapter Phillip is sent to encounter an Ethiopian Eunuch who is returning home after a visit to Jerusalem for worship. In this encounter the Ethiopian accepts the message of Phillip and is baptized into the Christian community and at this point in the Acts history the Christian community is now spreading to the south of Jerusalem (8:26-40). This pericope marks another spread of the movement but there is again a distinctive Jewish flavor because the Ethiopian had been in Jerusalem to worship in the Temple; though an Ethiopian, he was already a Jew.

The next key movement of the Gospel message from Jerusalem is contained in the conversion of Saul (9:1-31). Saul is converted and after some days in Damascus is sent to Jerusalem and there attains the approval of the leaders of the movement. After some time in Jerusalem when his teaching has gotten him into trouble with the traditional Jews, Saul now known as Paul, is sent to Tarsus to escape the persecution. With this escape the Christian message has left the Kingdom of Israel and entered Asia Minor. Perhaps the Christian movement already had converts in Asia Minor, one would expect that the leaders would send Paul to be protected in a region where there were already sympathizers; nonetheless, this is the first biblical account we have of the Gospel entering the region. After a brief exile though, Paul's ministry carries him back into the traditional boundaries of Israel to Joppa and Lydda.

At the same time Peter has his own conversion experience. Through visions given to Cornelius and himself, Peter is convinced that Gentiles as well as Jews can be included in the community (10:1-48). In the text this serves to authenticate the ministry of those who will go out to the Gentiles because through Peter, God has given permission for the Gentiles to be included in the chosen people. Peter, the lead disciple and one of the leaders if not the leader, of the Council in Jerusalem, has been commanded by God to accept all. This certainly must have been unbelievable to the common Jew as it admittedly was to Peter (10:28) and to the others with Peter (10:45). In faithfulness that changes the Gospel forever, Peter despite his reluctance, preaches to the Gentiles, hears their gifts of the Holy Spirit and baptizes them.

Now, by the end of chapter 10, not only have Jews outside of Jerusalem been baptized into the Christian community, but Gentiles have as well. In chapter eleven the rise of the church in Antioch is chronicled through the ministry of those who were with Stephen and included people who were of Gentile descent. Again the Church in Jerusalem sent a leader, Barnabas, to authentic their conversions. As the book of Acts continues Barnabas and Paul go further away from Jerusalem into regions surrounding Pamphylia (13:13-14:20). They are clearly still teaching in the synagogues and to the Jews however a change begins in the way that they address the crowds. In the beginning of the post resurrection ministry, whereas Peter addresses the crowds as, "You that are Israelites" (2:22), which clearly limits the audience, now Paul and Barnabas begin their addresses with, "You Israelites, and others who fear God" (13:16b). They have expanded the acceptable audience for the Gospel message. The struggle had begun. Paul and Barnabas went all over Asia Minor teaching to Jews and Gentiles alike and gaining

converts from both sides. There were, however, devout Jews who were angered by this ministry and forced Paul and Barnabas to leave. This struggle culminates in chapter 15 at the Council of Jerusalem.

There were leaders of the Christian movement on both sides of the impending debate. Some, like Paul and Barnabas, seemed to be accepting Gentiles into the Church without mention of the necessity to follow traditional Jewish Law such as circumcision. Others were teaching just the opposite as can be seen in Acts 15:1. The debate continued as two groups were brought before the Council of Jerusalem, which would presumably decide the argument for the Church. The struggle this issue brought upon the Church is evident in the speech that Peter gave before the Council. While he himself had been apprehensive of his ministry to the Gentiles in Caesarea (10:1-48), he talks in favor of allowing the Gentiles to enter the community without demanding that they follow any laws. James, another of the leaders in Jerusalem agrees with Peter but proposes a letter be written that outlines a few necessities for the Gentiles to follow. This opinion of James becomes the official statement of the Church and requires that the Gentiles, “abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication” (15:29).

This decision was obviously difficult but it was seen as paramount. In order to make this decision they called back the missionaries from afar and brought all the leaders together in Jerusalem. There are very few accounts in the New Testament of the Jerusalem Council meeting together and this was the occasion for one of the meetings. Plus the Council drafts a letter of their decision and appoints special messengers (Judas and Silas) to assure that the message was delivered correctly to the concerned groups

awaiting the decision. Despite all this, the issue is not put to rest. Even though the Council rules and makes their decision known, the issue, which is a struggle of multiculturalism, rises numerous times in the New Testament. Both the Roman community and the Corinthian community were concerned with the issue of the law and had people on both sides of the argument. Though the Council decides in favor of the movement being multicultural the issue remained a thorn in the flesh of the Church.

In rendering the decision the Council creates a movement with two sides, one a ministry to the Jews and the other a ministry to the Gentiles. It is important to realize that the Council was not saying that one side was faithful and the other not. Both the ministry to the Jews with one set of expectations concerning the law and the ministry to the Gentiles with another set of expectations were faithful expressions of the commission given by the risen Jesus to take the Gospel to the Jewish world and to the ends of the earth. These two emphases by necessity would take various directions. One in ministry to the Jews would have to speak the Jewish “language” and be within the traditions of Jerusalem and the ministries in the Gentile world would have to speak the Gentile “language.” This study is concerned with the Gentile “language” that develops through this ministry including the anthropology and theology that develops alongside the ministry to the Gentiles as the ministry encounters the Greco/Roman world. This is done recognizing the importance, validity and faithfulness of the ministry in Jerusalem and throughout Israel and affirming that the leaders of the Church were in agreement that these differences were acceptable.

In our settings today we must remember that there are multiple ways to be faithful to the directive of spreading the Gospel that Jesus gave. Some of those ways will result

in mono-cultural ministries and some must result in multicultural developments. Some of these ministries might even seem counter-cultural sometimes and exactly the opposite of the model. When we come to these barriers we must remember that Peter received and faithfully responded to a vision from God that was as counter-cultural as any vision could be in First Century Israel. However, it was Peter's faith and leadership that allowed the vision to become a reality. Leaders today very well might receive visions of where God is leading us in this multicultural problem and they ought to have the permission of the Church to be faithful to the visions, no matter how counter-cultural they might be. The Acts story of the movement of the Church out from Jerusalem is not without great conflict, compromise on both sides and bold stands from more than one leader.

### The Jerusalem Setting

It was no mistake that some in the Council were reluctant to include Gentiles in the Gospel proclamation. The community of Christians living in Jerusalem was relatively secluded from the rest of the world and heavy influence from foreign cultures. If there was minimal contact from the outside world and the community remained relatively stable, then what would be the impetus to change? The hypothesis here is that without an impetus the message from Jerusalem would not have a reason to change much.

Palestine was the center of the Fertile Crescent that was the trade routes between Egypt, Mesopotamia and Rome. Jerusalem is a secluded place well off these trade routes. The travelers would naturally stay away from mountains and deserts, which bring hardship, and attempt to travel on the flat lands. Through Palestine this meant that the travelers would stay near the coast and away from the cities like Jerusalem in the Judean

Mountains. No doubt, Jerusalem was not completely isolated but it was not the center of the route.

A study of the *Via Maris*, which was a late name of the historical highway through Palestine, gives a glimpse of just where travelers went. Known by different names but in use during all historical periods it is referred to precisely once by name, “the way of the sea,” in the Bible in Isaiah 9:1. If the travelers of the highway frequented Jerusalem it would be reasonable to think that the highway would have more references in the text. Modern recreations of the map show roads off to Jerusalem but the road ends in Jerusalem, which means one must be going to Jerusalem to have reason to travel that road. The road does not lead anywhere else; Jerusalem is not even a stop on the way to somewhere. In addition A. H. Gardiner points out in his study of the Egyptian scribe Hori that his description of the highway lacks a Jerusalem location.<sup>2</sup>

It should not surprise us that the travelers did not go to Jerusalem on their sojourn. The city lies in a basin at nearly 2,500 feet above sea level and 34 miles from the coast.<sup>3</sup> G. A. Smith points out that the steep ascent to Jerusalem kept it relatively safe from invaders on three sides. Common sense says these steep ascents would have been just as difficult for traders and other travelers to attain. Smith says, “we must realize that Jerusalem stood almost completely aloof.”<sup>4</sup> Smith goes on to point out that Jerusalem was not the center of commerce or a market for nomads. The weather is not particularly friendly in Jerusalem either with hot summers and cold winters being the two seasons.

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<sup>2</sup> A. H. Gardiner, *Journal of Egyptian Archeology* 6 (1920): 99-116, cited in Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. and ed. A. F. Rainey (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), 27.

<sup>3</sup> George Adam Smith, *Jerusalem: The Topography, Economics and History from the Earliest Times to A.D. 70*, vol. 1 (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1908), 31.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

All this shows that there is not great reason to visit or move to Jerusalem unless one is associated with Jerusalem's seed of power, Orthodox Judaism. Influence from outside cultures that might have provided an impetus for change did not happen in Jerusalem. In Jerusalem the Church encountered a place where a mono-cultural message worked because of the level of isolation. This is the same for some communities today. There are communities that are isolated due to their language, location or other factors and these communities ought not to be pushed into multicultural issues. A mono-cultural message like the one in Jerusalem will work for them.

### The Roman Setting

While Jerusalem remained stable, the Christian movement in the Greco/Roman world encountered a new culture, and the customs and ideas of that culture facilitate a transformation. This section will consider the sociological changes in the Greco/Roman world that made it fertile ground for the introduction of Christianity.

The time of the New Testament and the following century was a time of development that changed the thinking of the Greco/Roman world. A new view of the world was taking root that was a completely different view than the Old Testament writers and traditional Jewish communities of Palestine held. This view was heavily influenced by centuries of Greek Philosophy. The changes happen in three aspects of thought: cosmology, anthropology and theology. As the Pauline Christians encounter these changes it completely alters their orientation to life. Even before Paul and his followers, Jesus was thinking this way -- this is why passage after passage no one, not even his closest followers, understood him -- he already had this new orientation and they were still in the old system. Jesus was fortunate to live in Galilee where the trade routes



intersected from the Greco/Roman, Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Palestinian world.

Many ideas and worldviews passed through this part of Palestine that never made it to the mountainous regions of Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup>

In the new system there was a vast geo-centric universe with multiple elements and amazing complexities all of which was created by a God who must be larger than the universe.<sup>6</sup> This was opposed to the dome like universe in which God sat on the top of the dome, described in the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup> In the new system there were dualisms of good vs. bad and body vs. soul. The human goal of life was to live in such a way that the soul was untainted so that in death one could leave the body and return to the divine.<sup>8</sup> In the old system there were no dualisms and God was responsible for all, and if one was faithful then they were blessed with worldly treasures and if they were unfaithful they died and death was the end of the end.<sup>9</sup> In the new system God was a good and spiritual creator of the universe who loved creation and yearned to be united with creation. In the old system God was jealous and vengeful, could be contained in a temple, and at times walked the earth.

Sociologically there is a way to understand these changes. The world was becoming a more open place for travel and the exchange of ideas, as opposed to the world of the Old Testament which was more segregated, harder to navigate and more

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<sup>5</sup> The ideas from this paragraph are influenced by Professor Gregory J. Riley, especially from his course "Spirituality and Worship in the New Testament," Claremont School of Theology, Fall 2000.

<sup>6</sup> See: *Apocryphon of John*, I 30-III, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, trans. Frederik Wisse (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977) for depictions of God as larger than the universe. This text is contemporary with the time discussed here and gives us some insight into the new ideas.

<sup>7</sup> See Gen. 1:6-8.

<sup>8</sup> Prior to the New Testament the Greek philosopher Cicero wrote, "For that man whom your outward form reveals is not yourself; the spirit is the true self, not that physical figure which can be pointed out by the finger. Know, then, that you are a god, if a god is that which lives, feels, remembers, and foresees, and which rules, governs, and moves the body which it is set, just as the supreme God above us rules this universe. Cicero, *The Republic VI*, 24, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 279-80. This is one example of the understandings discussed here.

<sup>9</sup> See Deut. 28-29 for an example of a system of faithfulness based on rewards and punishments.

dangerous. Both Abraham Malherbe and Wayne Meeks make this argument in their respective works. Malherbe says, “The spread of Greek culture and language, Roman road building and political administration, and the security brought about by the Roman army all contributed to the comparative ease of travel.”<sup>10</sup> In the section of his book subtitled, “Mobility,” Meeks points to the same factors in arguing that the people of the Roman Empire could travel more extensively, more frequently and more safely than ever before.<sup>11</sup> The change in the everyday culture of the Greco/Roman world is also thought to have had an influence upon the ability of Christianity to spread. Meeks points out that the hegemony of Rome, meaning the centralized power over much of the east and west which had formerly been spread out to many rulers, lead to an urbanization never before seen and the sharing of a more centralized culture (Greco/Roman).<sup>12</sup> The effect of this centralized power according to Meeks was that cities that were self-ruled in the past, or ruled by someone other than the Romans, became more Greco/Roman in language, politics and social life. Robert Banks takes this same argument one step further saying that the centralized power created an identity crisis for many who were previously in power in their own province or city but were now relegated one class lower under the Roman authorities.<sup>13</sup> In response to this loss of power Banks says, “people began to find their desires fulfilled in a variety of voluntary associations that multiplied in cities all over the ancient world.”<sup>14</sup> These associations according to Banks were novel because they placed people of different race, geography and background in relationship with one

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<sup>10</sup> Abraham J. Malherbe, Social Aspects of Early Christianity (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 62.

<sup>11</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 16-23.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-17.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Banks, Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Historical Setting (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), 15-17.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

another based on interest, vocation or commitment. Shirley Jackson Case takes this same argument but turns it around noting how the Greeks appreciated and assimilated aspects of these other cultures into their own. She says, "Greek philosophers, historians, and poets adopted a cosmopolitan outlook," admiring the civilization of the Orient.<sup>15</sup>

Given these social changes it is easy to see how new information, such as Christianity, could be integrated into new places. More than ever before, people were living in closer proximity to one another, cities were becoming more diverse and the culture was more open than previously to new ideas. If one had not read this entire section one could be convinced that the previous two sentences were discussing many parts of our world today. Especially in the larger cities of the United States, as tolerance for diversity grows and economic systems become more color blind, we see examples of people from many different backgrounds living together in communities. The church must recognize and respond to this change before the gospel proclamation is rendered obsolete.

### The New Message

These social factors help us to understand how Christians suddenly began going to new places, teaching the Gospel and inviting others outside of their ethnic heritage into the community. It is important to realize that these social factors only explain how, not why they chose to do this. In the old system evident in the Old Testament we get the idea that even if the travel was easier and the cultures were more open the Israelites still would not have invited outsiders into their faith community. We do not have stories from Exodus about the Israelites trying to convert the Egyptians nor do we have stories about

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<sup>15</sup> Shirley Jackson Case, "The Nature of Primitive Christianity," American Journal of Theology 17 (1913): 68.

the exiles in Babylon teaching the foreigners the faith, rather the Babylonian story is about how to worship God in a foreign land.<sup>16</sup> The impetus for this change comes from the theological understandings of the Christians. These are the views that moved the Pauline Christians from a place where God was understood to be in favor of the national restoration of one people, the Israelites, to a place where they understood God to be Lord of all people. This understanding necessarily changed what it means to be the faith community.

The primary source for this side of the investigation leads us right into the New Testament. God is no longer One who is to be worshipped only in the Temple, who is concerned with the national restoration of Israel or limited to a certain people. John places these sentiments in the mouth of Jesus in his Gospel when Jesus is having a conversation with a Samaritan woman and says, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem . . . . God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (4:21, 24). This argument is furthered by Paul who writes in a letter to the church in Galatia, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (3:28). This view has a devastating impact upon the idea that the purpose of God is to restore Jerusalem and death will come to all who stand in the way. Suddenly God is spirit and cannot be contained by one people in a temple, but is apparently available to all people regardless of race, class or gender. This development does not begin with the New Testament writers. We see in other writings before and during New Testament times, similar understandings of God, as noted earlier

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<sup>16</sup> See Psalm 137, specifically v.4 in which the psalmist is asking how to sing a song to the Lord while in a foreign land. The psalmist is in exile in Babylon and believes that God is still in Jerusalem.

from the works of Cicero and the Apocryphon of John. As Christians develop this understanding for themselves, theologically the role of God has turned upside down and we will see the result is that the Christian community is also turned upside down when compared to the traditional Jewish community. Yes, it was helpful that social circumstances paved the way for Christians to travel with the Gospel to new and distant places, but it is these theological changes that tell us why they took the Gospel outside Israel.

These theological understandings took years, even centuries, to take root as did the transformation of the Christian communities; but through first and second century non-canonical writings we again see evidence of these changes. In *Octavius*, a late second century account of an argument over the merits of Paganism or Christianity, we see a multicultural way of life. The speaker is putting forth his Christian belief about God's community saying, "We call ourselves 'brethren' to which you object, as members of one family in God, as partners in one faith, as joint heirs in hope. You do not acknowledge one another, amid outbursts of mutual hate; you recognize no tie of brotherhood, except indeed for fratricidal murder."<sup>17</sup> The argument continues two sections later in *Octavius* saying, "We distinguish nations and tribes: to God the whole world is a single household."<sup>18</sup> Two centuries after the death of Jesus, the Christians are still discovering who they are as a community. These sorts of arguments are found all over first and second century writings such as Justin Martyr's blanket statement from the middle of the second century, "*All those* who have been convinced [*italics added*]," which does not contain exclusionary language based on race, gender or class about who

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<sup>17</sup> Minucius Felix, *Octavius XXXI*, 8, Loeb Classical Library (1931; reprint, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 413.

<sup>18</sup> *Octavius XXXIII*, 1, 417.

can be a part of the Christian community.<sup>19</sup> The *Gospel of Thomas*, which may be dated as early as the first century, gives us another image of the kingdom this time in the mouth of Jesus, when he says, “But the Kingdom is within you and it is without you.”<sup>20</sup> These views of who are included in the community of God and what that Kingdom is like are the antithesis of the view of national restoration held by the Temple Priests. The words of Ignatius, late in the first and early in the second century, speak clearly to this opposing view when he writes, “The ends of the earth and the kingdoms of this world shall profit me nothing. It is better for me to die in Christ Jesus than to be king over the ends of the earth.”<sup>21</sup>

Through the study of early Christian non-canonical writings and even non-Christian Greco/Roman writings we see many references to the spread of Christianity. In his own study of the history during the late third and early fourth centuries C.E., Eusebius chronicles the rapid growth of Christianity in the west saying, “the voice of its [The Gospel’s] inspired evangelists and apostles went forth into all the earth.”<sup>22</sup> Later in the same work by, there are accounts of the many apostles and their locations.<sup>23</sup> There is another example of the growth of the Christian movement, circa 112 C.E., in the letter from Pliny to Trajan when Pliny is concerned about the “number of persons [Christians] endangered” and in the same letter states that, “people have begun to throng the temples

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<sup>19</sup> Justin Martyr, *First Apology LXI*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1953), 183.

<sup>20</sup> Ron Cameron, ed. *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 25.

<sup>21</sup> *Ignatius to the Romans, 6.1*, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library (1912; reprint, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 233.

<sup>22</sup> Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, trans. G. A. Williamson, rev. and ed. Andrew Louth (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 39.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 65, 100. Here are two examples of such passages from the text.

which had been almost entirely deserted for a long time.”<sup>24</sup> It seems that the spread of Christianity was so prevalent that there were even provisions in the *Didache*, a first and second century ‘church manual,’ as to how to treat the traveling teachers. In one passage the believers are instructed that, “whosoever comes and teaches you all these things aforesaid, receive him. But if the teacher himself be perverted and teach another doctrine to destroy these things, do not listen to him, but if his teaching be for the increase of righteousness and knowledge of the Lord, receive him as the Lord.”<sup>25</sup> There is little question in studying the historical documents that Christians were found in many places outside of Israel.

These ideas radically change the Christian community. In his book *Ante Pacem*, Graydon Snyder points out the “unusual warmth” in a letter between a scribe and its recipient, perhaps giving insight into the relationships between Christians from different classes.<sup>26</sup> Snyder also uses an early Christian letter to point out the practice of receiving fellow Christians who are relocating to a new place, which again gives us perspective on the inclusion of possible outsiders into the community.<sup>27</sup> Richard Horsley comments on the Christian community in light of the Markan text (10:28-30) in which a believer receives family, possessions and land, presumably that is shared by the other believers when one becomes a follower of Jesus.<sup>28</sup> Oscar Cullman also comments on the ethos of the community by referring back to the *Didache* (9.4), “As the broken bread was

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<sup>24</sup> *Pliny: Letters and Panegyricus II, Book X, XCVI*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 291.

<sup>25</sup> *Didache, XI:1-2*, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 325.

<sup>26</sup> Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 150-51.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>28</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), 122-23.

scattered upon the mountains, but was brought together and became one, so let thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy Kingdom.”<sup>29</sup> This same acknowledgement of unity within the Christian community is pointed out by Meeks who uses Paul’s letter to the Romans (3:29) and says, “Paul argued that this eschatological unity of Jews and Gentiles in the new household of Christ was the logical implication of monotheism itself.”<sup>30</sup> In a very interesting study Goran Forkman looks at the reasons for expulsion from three religious groups and finds that within “Primitive Christianity” expulsions did not seem to be based on ethnicity as in other religious groups and concludes that the Christians were vague about their intolerance, except when it came to false prophets, and perhaps the best way to describe the issue was that, “it was preferably left to the individual to decide on which side of the boundary he was to stand.”<sup>31</sup>

A new world, the Greco/Roman one, made it possible to spread the Gospel. Travel was less dangerous, culture and language was more uniform, and social boundaries were slightly more porous. But it was new understandings of the humanity (anthropology), the world (cosmology), and God (theology), that caused the Christians to take advantage of the new world in order to share their message. Christians can do the same again in recapturing these anthropological, cosmological and theological ideas that were so effective in transmitting the Gospel to the multicultural world that Paul and his followers encountered.

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<sup>29</sup> Oscar Cullmann, Early Christian Worship (Bristol, Ind.: Wyndham Hall Press, 1953), 19.

<sup>30</sup> Meeks, 92.

<sup>31</sup> Goran Forkman, The Limits of the Religious Community: Expulsion from the Religious Community within the Qumran Sect, within Rabbinic Judaism, and within Primitive Christianity, trans. Pearl Sjolander (Lund, Sweden: CWK Gleerup, 1972), 177-90.



### **The Multicultural Message**

**This cultural and sociological setting provides fertile ground for a transformation of the Christian movement. What was once an ethnocentric movement centered in Jerusalem under the guidance of Peter and the Council began to interact with other cultures and ideas. The influence of this meeting was that the Christian evangelists oversaw a transformation from ethnocentrism to multiculturalism. Of course we won't find the word multicultural used in the New Testament or other writings of the first and second century, but the multicultural message is explicit in these writings.**

**This transformation was not a planned strategic movement by the evangelists taking the Gospel to the Greco/Roman world. When they encounter the mixed cultures of the new world they seem to be initially intending to preach to the Jews. The text repeatedly says they went to the synagogues or looked for them and finding none or being kicked out of the one's they did find they taught elsewhere. When they went to teach elsewhere in public places there would have been many folks from various backgrounds around, perhaps more Gentiles than Jews at times. At that moment the evangelists had a decision to make, they could expel all the non-Jews, speak two different messages, or include the Gentiles in the Gospel proclamation. Clearly it was the vision of Paul, the Gospel writers and others that the correct approach was to include the Gentiles and all in the message. As a result there is a rich history of New Testament passages concerned with the proclamation to the Gentiles. Paul says it plainly in Galatians 3 and the Gospels of John and Mark each have poignant pericopes concerning the topic as well (John 4:1-42, Mark 7:24-30).**

Clearly this multicultural proclamation is being made a message of the Gospel as it encounters the Greco/Roman world. One important question to ask is whether this new proclamation is simply the product of creative evangelists who transform the message in light of their encounter with a multi-ethnic world. Certainly this could be the case; however, there is another factor that had a major impact on the Greco/Roman world, the Greek philosophical ideas about the soul.

There have been many attempts made to trace the rise of the idea of the soul in Greek philosophy and this study will not attempt to duplicate these previous studies.<sup>32</sup> It is important though that we consider in what ways the Greek philosophers and as a result some in the culture were talking about the soul so that we can see ways in which the Pauline Christians might have been influenced in their theological constructions. In *The Republic*, Plato's discourse about an ideal society, Plato turns to talking about the individual member of the republic. A large portion of this discussion concerns the pleasures that a man might seek. Plato, believing in the dualism between body and soul, differentiates between what would bring pleasure to the body and what would bring pleasure to the soul. The body, left to its own devices would seek power, wealth, prestige and other like attributes. On the other hand, concerning the soul Plato says,

He not only will not abandon the habit and nurture of his body to the brutish and irrational pleasure and live with his face set in that direction, but he will not even make health his chief aim, not give the first place to the ways of becoming strong or healthy or beautiful unless these things are likely to bring with them soberness of spirit, but he will always be found attuning the harmonies of his body for the sake of the concord of his soul.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> One view of the development of the soul can be found in the fifth chapter of Gregory J. Riley's book, *The River of God: A New History of Christian Origins* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Plato, *The Republic, IX & XIII*, ed. Paul Shorey, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1935), 411.

If this were exemplary of the Greco/Roman influence upon the Pauline Christians it would certainly draw them away from the messages that one might hear in Jerusalem. The philosopher is not concerned with the things of this world such as food laws or earthly Kingdoms like Israel. The primary aim of the philosopher is the care of the soul. This language is the antithesis of Old Testament passages such as Deuteronomy 29 in which faith leads to worldly rewards such as wealth, progeny and power. Rather it reminds one of the Gospel account from Matthew (6:25-34) in which the faithful are told not to worry about the things of the world like food and clothing. It is also reminiscent of Paul's speech to the Corinthians in which he discards the importance of eating or not eating certain foods because it is not really important (8:1-13). What is important to Paul in this passage is the soul of those without "knowledge." Christianity in the Roman Empire is being introduced into a culture where one of the ideas is a dualism between body and soul that moves the important aspects of life away from worldly or bodily cares and places the importance on the care of the soul. This idea was not new at Paul's time, it had been around and Plato had written four hundred years prior to Paul and many philosophers after Plato had thought about the dualism between body and soul as well. Paul was encountering an idea that had taken root in Greco/Roman thought and was the popular notion.

Greek philosophy not only had strong feelings about how one ought to live and orient their lives but also about death. A dualistic view of body and soul led to new ideas about death as well. In Plato's *Phaedo*, which is the retelling of the last conversations with Socrates between he and a few friends, the Greek philosophical viewpoints of the

soul are clearly delineated. Socrates answers a question from his friend about death with the following,

We believe, do we not, that death is the separation of the soul from the body, and that the state of being dead is the state in which the body itself is separated from the soul and exists alone by itself and the soul is separated from the body and exists alone by itself.<sup>34</sup>

In death, the body and soul are separated which is a foreign concept in Judaism because there was no soul and as we see later in the conversation that the separation serves a distinct purpose in Greek philosophy. Socrates goes on to say,

But it (the soul) thinks best when none of these things troubles it, neither hearing nor sight, nor pain nor any pleasure, but it is, so far as possible, alone by itself, and takes leave of the body, and avoiding, so far as it can, all association or contact with the body, reaches out toward the reality.<sup>35</sup>

In this dialogue we see that not just is the body forsaken of pleasures such as food and clothing in this life but the body is forsaken forever. The ideal state of man is death in which the soul is able to escape from the body and finally reach up to the Reality. Again, these passages make one think of Pauline passages such as 2 Corinthians 5 where he says, "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens . . . so we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord" (5:1, 6). Paul clearly sees a dualism between the body and soul and speaks on

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<sup>34</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus, Phaedo*, 64, in *Loeb Classical Library* (1914, reprint, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966) 223.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, *Phaedo* 65, 227.

behalf of the Christian to say that they ought to wish to be rid of the body so that they will no longer be away from the Lord, which is parallel in intent to Socrates' saying about the soul's ability to reach the reality when freed of the body. Again this is not language to be heard of in Jerusalem. This was pointed out in the previous section of this chapter that considered the action of the Jerusalem Council in accepting Gentiles into the faith. The letter drafted by the Council was not instructing the new believers to concentrate on the care of the soul and free the soul from the body rather the letter was instructing them to abstain from certain foods and acts of the body.

These ideas of the soul led Paul and other Christians in the Roman world to theologies of multiculturalism. While the Jewish message was once about a chosen people who were related through bloodlines, now there was a new way of thinking about this group of people. Again we turn to the *Phaedo* for an example of this idea. In a portion of the conversation concerning absolute beauty and goodness Socrates says,

Or did you ever reach them with any of the bodily senses? I am speaking of all such things, as size, health, strength, and in short the essence or underlying quality of everything. Is their true nature contemplated by means of the body? Is it not rather the case that he who prepares himself most carefully to understand the true essence of each thing that he examines would come nearest to the knowledge of it? . . . Would not that man do this most perfectly who approaches each thing, so far as possible, with the reason alone, not introducing sight into his reasoning nor dragging in any of the other senses along with his thinking, but who employs pure, absolute reason in his attempt to search out the pure, absolute essence of things, and who removes himself, so far as possible, from eyes and ears, and, in a word, from his whole body, because he feels that its companionship disturbs the soul and hinders it from attaining truth and wisdom? Is not this the man, Simmias, if anyone, to attain to the knowledge of reality?<sup>36</sup>

When one thought in this way the identity of people was changed. The ways that people might be divided according to gender, race, ethnicity, etc., was no longer important.

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<sup>36</sup> *Phaedo* 65, 229.

Souls were completely different from bodies and did not contain any of these delineating marks -- they are without ethnicities, languages or genders. In the Jerusalem church they were still struggling to discern whether it was faithful to baptize Gentiles, a people who bore different marks than the “chosen people.” At the same time Paul was traveling throughout the Roman Empire saying things like, “for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26-28).

There are numerous references in the New Testament that share this viewpoint. It is important to remember that the Gospels were all Greek language documents written by people versed in the culture of the present discussion. One such pericope that illustrates this multicultural viewpoint is from the Gospel of Mark when Jesus encounters the Syrophoenician woman. Initially Jesus is reluctant to share with her as she asks because she is not an Israelite. Jesus says, “Let the children be fed first,” referring to the children of Israel or “people of God” (Mark 7:27). Amazingly she argues with Jesus and he seems to relent or be awakened to the reality that all are welcome to the power of God. She is a foreign woman, which would cross two of the boundaries commonly set by the traditional Jewish leaders as two barriers not to cross. In the end Jesus seems to see past these barriers to a common identity that she shares with all people. This pericope gives us interesting problems. Some, especially feminist theologians, have suggested that Jesus was awakened at this encounter. That prior to this encounter he was blinded by the patriarchal society in which he lived and the pericope serves to explain his movement away from this tradition. This reading would certainly be helpful to one looking for the

multicultural ethic of Jesus, but there is another way of looking at the passage that is even more powerful. One could make the argument that the Gospel writer already had Jesus embracing a multicultural ethic because otherwise why would Jesus be in Syrophenicia if his ministry was to the “chosen people” defined as Israelites. Thus, the pericope is not about Jesus’ awakening but rather about the readers awakening when surprised at the location of Jesus. This latter use of the pericope is much like how the Gospel writer uses the story of the Good Samaritan. The cultural sensitivity piece that modern readers miss is that a traditional Jewish reader of this text would have first said, “What, there is no such thing as a good Samaritan.” Thus the pericope is about more than just this good guy, it is about crossing the boundaries of Israel. In another story from the Gospel of John, Jesus is again conversing with a woman, this time who is outside of the ethnic barriers being a Samaritan. This time the conversation turns to who, how and where one ought to worship God. After the woman comments that the Samaritans worship on the mountain and others in the Temple, Jesus says, “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24). This is not completely taken out of the Israelite context, they would probably argue that they are worshipping God in spirit and truth, but it is out of the context of the Temple. No longer does worship happen on mountains or in temples, which can be established within national boundaries, but worship is taken to a spiritual realm that encompasses all people. The spirit and truth of worship was no longer about what happened within national boundaries but rather about the connection that individuals and communities could have with God, who had no boundaries.

### Conclusions

Jerusalem and the Roman Empire are vastly different places. Jerusalem is secluded and a relatively stable community with few influences from the outside world. The Roman Empire on the other hand is open to travelers and the new ideas that they bring with them. The sociological factors are perfect for introducing a new religion or way of thought and this is what happens with the Pauline Christians.

Obviously, the message of the Christians had to change from the traditional message of Jerusalem if it was going to be heard in the Roman Empire. Paul and the others would not have been very successful if they continued talking about a “chosen people” who were Israelite by birth and about the restoration of Israel. Few in the Roman Empire would have fit into the definition of the “chosen people” and few would have cared about the restoration of Israel. The time when this change was needed was also the time in which Paul and others were encountering the dualistic ideas of the Greek Philosophers, specifically new ideas of the soul. These were incorporated into the Gospel message transforming this part of Christianity. The ideas did not water down the Gospel – the ultimate message was the same as the message which was being proclaimed in Jerusalem – Jesus was the Son of God, died, was resurrected and through the risen Christ “all” were offered eternal life.

Who the “all” encompassed and the way a connection with God was attained did change. In Jerusalem one connected through following the law but in the Greco/Roman world one connected through the cleansing of the soul. The changes were necessary in order to unite a multicultural society into the worship of One God. The common element



of all people, the soul, was the key factor in this theological transformation. This is the same theological transformation that is needed today in multicultural settings.

We must do like Paul did, and help people to see beyond their differences and towards their common identity. This does not deny who they are or where they have come from, it simply gives them another reality in which to live and practice faith. Paul did not deny the diversity of the people; on the contrary he used the diversity of the people as a witness to how powerful and benevolent God was – in light of your diversity you can still be connected to God and one another through your soul. This argument only works in a diverse population and ought to be a witness to the contemporary church's theological and social constructions.

## CHAPTER 3

### Exegeting the Community

The model of religious education presented here relies heavily on the principle of *praxis*, as it is used by liberation theologians. These theologians have been utilizing this idea in order to articulate their view that human action can lead to transformation in the world. The argument of liberationists is that action has two equal counterparts, action and reflection, and when practiced together (*praxis*), transformation can occur. Paulo Freire says it simply, “But human action consists of action and reflection: it is *praxis*.”<sup>1</sup> Praxis is built into the model presented here, because the model will both include concrete times of action by individuals and congregations as well as times of reflection. As in liberation theology, *praxis* is an ongoing cycle, there is constant action happening and reflection upon that action and then more action and so on. The times of action grow out of the times of reflection and the reflection is always upon the action itself and the result of the action.

Depending on the focus of the work different emphasis might be placed on what tools to use and how to reflect. For example, in his very influential work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire first asks the reader to reflect upon current models of education. Freire acts to rethink education and a new model of learning. With this learning the community is then asked to be in dialogue with the world and then reflect upon what they learn through the dialogue. After all of this reflection and action the transformative action may be birthed. Freire was very intentional about his reflection upon the systems

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<sup>1</sup> Freire, 106.

of education and what that meant for the oppressed. Other models of liberation theology show other points of emphasis. In his work, Christ Outside the Gate, Orlando E. Costas reflects heavily upon the Gospel account of Jesus' death.<sup>2</sup> His action of understanding and taking the Church into a new place of salvation, to the outsiders, grows directly from his reflection upon the death of Jesus that occurred outside of the city. Costas is emphasizing that Jesus died outside of the city where the other outcasts were subjugated to, as opposed to dying inside the gates of the city where the rich and powerful tended to stay. In the model presented here there are multiple times of reflection called for. One has already been presented in Chapter 2. The model asks you to reflect biblically and theologically and to form new ideas of the biblical witness that will form the foundation for how the Church is designed, the action. Another important place of reflection is contextual, what are the characteristics of the place and people where the model is being developed.

Perhaps the most important aspect of multicultural religious education is being aware that we live in a particular context and we bring the attributes of that context with us into the Church. One of the reasons this reflection is so important today is that for centuries dominant groups who held leadership in the Church have ignored it. They have created Church in "their context" as "the context" for Church and have left many feeling outcast even in the Church. They failed to reflect on the possibility that other contexts were different than theirs and even when the dominant groups were able to admit that other contexts were present they relegated those contexts as second class.

As I propose this model it is important to understand that I am a young white male from working middle class descent and that I have formal education beyond the level that

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<sup>2</sup> Orlando E. Costas, Christ Outside the Gate (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1982).

most of my parishioners and the world will attain. I have lived a privileged life and both consciously and unconsciously have taken advantage of this which at times has adversely affected others. It is from this vantage point that I am a pastor and religious educator and from which I propose this model. The understanding of the lenses through which we personally view the world is important but will not be dealt with further here, rather it will be left up to the reader to reflect upon.

The contextual reflection that will be the focus of this chapter is of the community context. We must discover the explicit and implicit attributes of a community before we ever begin to think about developing a model for religious education in that community. This chapter will focus on one particular community, the Westmont Neighborhood of Pomona, California that is the community in which I work and live. The hope is that through this reflection the reader might discover both the importance of this contextual reflection and particular tools useful to the process. We will see that with creativity, everything that happens in a community can be understood in some way as symptomatic of the people and their values of that community. This process yearns to pull out the meanings and intentions of a community from the stories and facts about the community much the same way that in Chapter 2 we were attempting to pull out the meaning of the biblical writers from within the stories presented therein.

### The Westmont Community

One of the tools that is tremendously helpful in understanding a community is storytelling. The facts of a community can tell us many things about who lives there, but they cannot tell us the essence or nature of the community. There is something about storytelling that touches that essence and gives us a glimpse into who the community is

beyond the sheer numbers. Professor Frank Rogers says that within stories we find truths, even if the facts of the story are not correct; beyond the facts are truths about creation, human nature or a particular community.<sup>3</sup> That is the reason why we tell fables and fairytales to our children as they grow up. Within those fictional stories that are clearly not true, we hope they discover truths about how to treat one another, how to grow up, who to trust and who to avoid, etc. In the story that opened this project there was not one credible fact, it was completely made up, and yet we can see a truth through the eyes of Maria about her experience in the Church and transpose that truth to the lives of other children who are real. Real stories, like the one I am about to tell, can also give us glimpses into the reality of a community and contain truths deep inside of them. This story is a glimpse into Westmont and was in fact one of my first glimpses into the community.

It happened on my first Sunday as Pastor at the Westmont United Methodist Church. Westmont UMC was an old church, literally, according to the standards of Southern California. Built in the forties and fifties as the center of one of the first planned communities ever, it was to be the home for all the war vets and their families as they transitioned to the post war industry booming in Pomona. I imagine it was beautiful in its infancy, those sparkling windows looking out over the community onto the hills. New offices, new sanctuary, new social hall, two prayer chapels, and more room than you could ever imagine for the throngs of children to play. It must have been quite a place. But now, it was old. If you wanted to look out of those glass windows up to the hills, which was still a striking view from the pulpit on Sunday, you had to look through

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<sup>3</sup> Professor Frank Rogers, "Ministering Through Story," lecture given for the course "Religious Education Through the Dramatic Arts," Claremont School of Theology, 24 April 2001.

cobwebs and layers of forgotten dirt. In order to get a glimpse of the rooms where the children had once played you had to tug at the door that may not have been opened for at least five years. Once inside you were greeted by old broken chalk boards, little wooden chairs now splintering from old age themselves and jewels of the technological past like reel to reel movie projectors and record players, and it was all covered with layers and layers of dust which was now more like dirt. Almost every room, once as new as could be, was musty from lack of use and sanitation (even the offices). The doors did not close just right, the lights were dim, the paint was peeling and the ceilings all bore marks of water damage from the leak that happened yesterday or maybe twenty years ago. The rooms that were used, two primarily, one for worship and one for everything else, were moderately clean and quite homely. My favorite, the parlor, which was that room used for everything else, had an array of furniture that had been deemed too old or too out of style for someone's home but perfect for the church. The church was literally old -- figuratively as well.

The congregation was quite excited that day to hear from their new "young" minister (I was twenty four at the time). In fact, they were so excited that the regulars put out the call to everyone they could think of to be there, and there all twenty of them sat in the pews to greet me. What was once two hundred and fifty or more was now twenty-five or less every Sunday. Many of the members had died or moved away to be closer to their family in old age, especially since the neighborhood had taken a turn for the worse. Many of the ones who were still alive had moved to a church that was "still alive," and others had just called it quits on organized religion. It was difficult to be a member of a church that was "dying," the pain of the memories of how promising it had once been

compared to the reality of the dreary future was a lot to bear. I had a sense of this, so I knew that those that were still around were the most loyal church members I might ever serve; they would die for and with that church if that's what it would take.

I knew this before I faced them that day and I also knew that those who would be there that day had braved arthritis, lingering pain from that surgery a year ago, loneliness due to the recent death of a spouse or close friend and the pain caused by the departure of the previous pastor. It was a lot for them to be there, but they had come to hear their new pastor. And so, I was not going to let them down. I would prepare the best sermon they would ever hear, and the liturgy would be touching and invocative of God's spirit, and the music would be cheerful and easy to sing. Sure, I will admit that I wanted to be good so they would not write me off as a kid without a clue, but I also was on a mission to awaken their spirits.

Fortunately for the couple months prior to this Sunday I had been in a study program that meant I did not have preaching responsibilities anywhere at the time. This was good because it gave me a chance to work and work on that sermon. I wrote and rewrote and rewrote again. I spent sleepless nights wondering what the first sermon ought to be about, and then questioning the sermon that I had written. I had read books about the first sermon and prayed many a prayers about that first sermon. Finally I decided the course, probably because I was running out of time, and the sermon was complete. Then I practiced and practiced – into the tape recorder, in front of the mirror, taking a shower, in the car – I knew that sermon so well that I could probably still give it verbatim today, years later. These folks deserved a good sermon and I was going to give it to them.

On that day, everything was perfect. I was dressed in my best suit (which was also my only) as were the men of the congregation and the women all had their hair done and their dresses looked great. It was one of those mid-August mornings in California when the sun is so bright at 8:00 am. that you forget there will actually be days later in the winter when the sun won't come around, it is unimaginable. Everyone was on time to church and the music sounded great, bringing smiles to their faces and the liturgy was just right, bringing comfort to their hearts. There were grand welcomes and smiles and even hugs and handshakes, and that was even before they heard me preach. And then it was time, the songs had been sung, the prayers prayed, the scriptures read and now the church waited for the Word to be preached by the new young minister. I stood up and buttoned my coat and walked right out into the middle of the worship platform away from the pulpit.

I am sure they all wondered what I was doing out of the pulpit and they were about to discover that my style was not the old 'stand behind the pulpit with a glass of water and notes before you style,' I was going to stand right there before them, without a single note, and give them everything I had. I began, and the men sat back in their pews arms around wives and hands on their chins appearing to listen as attentively as I had ever seen. The women were much the same, not distracted by a thing. I had their complete attention. During that sermon not one person fell asleep, no one was balancing their check book, no one was flipping aimlessly through the scriptures, no one was checking their watches, no one was getting up to use the restroom, everyone was completely with me, or at least pretended like they were very well, because I was fooled. And the sermon was good, at times they were laughing, at times I could see the light



bulbs of understanding turning on, I could feel them say, “wow, I had never thought of that verse in that way,” and maybe even a tear or two was shed. I had worked hard on that sermon and it was coming off perfect. The exegetical work was good and poignant, the use of imagery and illustration was effective, the voice inflections and dramatic pauses were perfect and all was going well and leading up to a powerful close.

Now, one thing you have to know about Westmont UMC is that for the entire building there are two little swamp coolers that serve as the summer reprieve from the heat. It is pretty reasonable most days in Southern California but there are those few days in the year, especially in August, when even Pomona can see triple digits on the temperature dial, and this was one of them. By the time worship began at 10:30 am. it was probably already ninety degrees and the sanctuary was hot. I quickly figured this out after only about ten minutes of worship – the suit would be right back to the cleaners in the morning. Besides the minute swamp coolers, the only way to get any circulation in the sanctuary is to open the two sets of double doors that lead from the sanctuary out to the front of the church and the doors were open on this day. Though it was hot and only getting hotter as I neared the twenty-minute mark of the sermon it was still quite nice as a preacher standing there in the front of the congregation. You are the only one who gets to look out those doors onto the street, neighboring school and hills just beyond the community and it was all shinning in the brilliant sunlight.

And so, in the heat, with the whir of the coolers off in the distance and the doors open before me I neared the end of this, my greatest sermon. Standing before them I raised my voice just a bit right where I had planned and sped up my delivery so that they knew we were coming to the end and the most important thing of a very important

sermon. And I got a little louder and faster and a little more of both and then just a sentence very slow and quiet in comparison, now I had them, they were with me and they were hanging on to every word I was saying and I could see it in their faces they were begging to know what the very next word would be. "Come on, give it to us," was what their eyes were screaming out to me. But I didn't, I paused. it was the perfect insertion of the dramatic pause, there they could beg some more, think about the sentence just past and anticipate what was next and then would come the big closing. It was perfect as I stood there amidst the dramatic pause and just before I began again, I heard a faint noise. It sounded like a children's song, one that I knew but could not place at the time. Where was it coming from? The dramatic pause grew longer and the music grew louder, and then I knew. I knew the tune, it was the ice cream truck song, "Pop Goes the Weasel." I had heard it a million times in my life and here it was now; but where was it coming from. And then, as I stood in front of the congregation, amidst a dramatic pause mind you. looking out those two sets of double doors that had to be open, lest we all suffocate. by drove the ice cream man. As the truck went by the sound of "Pop Goes the Weasel" was sucked through those two sets of double doors and filled the sanctuary. It was 11:20 am. and the ice cream man had ruined my dramatic pause.

My mind, the men's minds, the women's minds were all on "Pop Goes the Weasel." The dramatic pause, it was over and had lost its effect, the people neither remembered what was before it or what might come after it. they remembered, "Pop Goes the Weasel." Even though I was remembering being a boy chasing the ice cream truck down the street with my fifty cents clinched in my sweaty fist, I had practiced the sermon enough that I remembered the finish and I gave it to them. Afterwards some

people thought it was a bit comical and I did too a couple weeks later but at that moment I thought it was just sacrilegious. What was even worse was that this was not the last time that the ice cream truck drove right through my sermon. Some weeks it was 11:20 am., some 11:00 am., some weeks right in between but no matter what time or how short or long my sermon was he always drove right through it. After about the fourth week in a row, after church I drove around the neighborhood and finally found him and asked him if he would mind driving a different route through the neighborhood so he came by the church about noon rather than 11:00 am., to which he agreed. To this day he has not driven through another of my sermons, but he has made an indelible impression on that old church and me.

I began to exegete that moment in which he drove right through my sermon and all the Sunday mornings he drove through the neighborhood before noon. I tried to pull out the meaning of what it meant that he was there. First, you rarely see adults chasing the ice cream truck down the street. It is almost always kids who are running or riding down the street to catch up to the truck with their few coins or wadded up dollars in search of a cold treat. The ice cream man makes it his business to know where the kids, his biggest customers, are. Assuming this ice cream man was the same and considering it safe to assume he was doing good business since he kept coming back, I could exegete the fact that there is a good percentage of children in this community surrounding the church and therefore a large number of young families. As we look at the various types of communities it is also reasonable to see the ice cream truck as a sign of economic status, or lack thereof. The ice cream truck is not out driving around wealthier communities who might choose to purchase a box of Hagen Daas ice cream bars for the

price of about three dollars per bar or take their family out to the local Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream Store for a twenty dollar outing. The ice cream truck makes his way through communities with lower economic status, another exegetical understanding of the community surrounding the church. Another understanding that we can gain from the ice cream man is that there are many kids and by association families surrounding this church that may not be involved in a religious community. Most religious communities in the United States meet Sunday mornings and yet the ice cream man meets enough kids on the street corners in this community Sunday mornings to continue returning.

This old church had an epiphany. A simple community exegesis gave us the idea to begin looking deeper into who lives in our community and what their lives are like. In that search which utilized many more tools to be explained here, we discovered that in fact our community was comprised of an overwhelming number of young families with children, that these families were at the lower working class end of the economic spectrum and that many of them were not involved in the life of a religious institution at all. With this understanding in hand we were able to direct our attention and resources toward being in ministry to young families with children with a particular emphasis on ways in which we would engage their economic situations as well. The exegesis of the community was a particular time of reflection that then gave us the necessary understanding for, and called us into, action. Included in this time of reflection was quantitative evidence such as demographic studies of the immediate neighborhood and surrounding city and qualitative evidence learned through personal conversations that congregation members had with members of the community. As the evidence of this reflection began to amount we grew in knowledge of who the community was

surrounding this church and which issues we might address in order to share the Gospel with this particular community.

When the neighborhood was founded and constructed in the late forties through the decade of the fifties, Westmont was full of happy and comfortable Anglo families thriving in the post World War II economy. The church body reflected the neighborhood exactly. But as we all know and are experiencing in Southern California and many other metropolis centers, neighborhoods change. Right before our eyes neighborhoods will change ethnically, socially, and economically. We generally speak about these changes as being for the worse – the wealthy move into newer homes in other places further from the city and the old neighborhoods become poorer and ethnic (that is ethnic other than Anglo). Mainstream culture can take these changes for the worse but the Church and the Christian culture should not abandon the neighborhood like school districts and businesses, but rather should embrace the new neighbors. This is where most churches begin to die – they are unable to embrace the new and allow their ministries to reflect the changes.

WUMC and others face a spectrum of multicultural issues. The old neighbors are just that, old. These people often built and cared for the church for decades in the Anglo enclave during the 1950s and 60s and now only a few are left. As housing prices devalued over the years it enabled young families just starting out to purchase houses and call the neighborhood home. One issue for multicultural education is the generation gap. People who were children of the Great Depression and fought Hitler in WWII certainly have a different worldview than people who were children of the 80's and raise their children in the technological age. Everything about life is different – finances,

entertainment, family values, politics, education, etc. The Westmont neighborhood is broken up into the following generations: 17.7% born after 1982, 36.2% born 1961-1981, 31.4% born 1943-60, 9.4% born 1925-1942, and 5.3% born before 1924.<sup>4</sup> The average age of the neighborhood is 31 while the majority of church members are 65 and older.<sup>5</sup> We are dealing with two different cultures attempting to cohabitate in one community.

As can be expected the old and new look and speak differently as well. As with many neighborhoods the new neighbors are multi-ethnic. Demographic studies of the Westmont neighborhood show the following ethnic breakdown: 51.0% Hispanic, 27.7% Anglo, 11% African American, and 10.4% Asian/other.<sup>6</sup> The only group projected to decrease in size over the next 10 years is the Anglo population. This is the classic multicultural problem we deal with but as discussed earlier there are others to be aware of such as generation issues.

The particular case of Westmont is not a peculiar case. In these churches educational issues are paramount. For adults on one hand you have the older neighbors who grew up in a time when “everybody” went to Church, so they have heard the biblical stories hundreds of times. But the new neighbors grew up in a time when the Church was fading out of the cultural norm and we cannot assume they grew up in the Church and know the stories. Obviously, this alone presents issues for study and preaching that a homogenous church would not have to consider.

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<sup>4</sup> This information was gathered by Percept and completed 15 February 2000. This company uses information from the US Census Bureau for their data and used the 1990 Census for this study with updated 1999 information (Percept Group, Inc., 151 Kalmus Drive Ste. A104, Costa Mesa, CA 92626-5900).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid..

<sup>6</sup> Ibid..

The greater challenge is dealing with a multiplicity of master narratives and understandings of who Jesus is. An older Anglo who has lived relatively financially secure for their adult life certainly thinks of God in different ways than a first generation Mexican immigrant, a Chinese immigrant, and an African American. Each of these and every other group or person bring their own understandings of God and themselves in relation to God to the community. This will be discussed further in the pedagogical approaches of this paper, but we must recognize that one's experience of the world, when drastically different from another's, will lead to different theology and perspective. This in turn, will lead to great challenges for the leadership of churches like WUMC.

There is not one given way to exegete a community or one tool that will always prove helpful. Exegeting a community is about understanding the major forces and the minor activities that shape and form any given community. It is about understanding your own experience of the place and the experience of others and reflecting upon the differences between the two. This section was simply to help understand the theory of exegeting a community and give a glimpse of how one church began to understand the community which they were called to serve. Let us now turn to another church and another example of exegeting a community.

### The Glendora Community

There are many Church growth consultants who would thankfully accept a high price to go into a church and tell them what they need to do. This is certainly a form of reflection but it lies outside of this model because it violates the principle of community exegesis. I do not profess to be a Church growth consultant nor do I want this chapter or any part of this project to suggest that I or anyone else could stand outside of a

community and know what is best for it. Effective exegesis of a community must come from within the community, from the people who are in some way members of that community, rather than being imposed from the outside. Because of this, the current section will differ greatly from the previous – I am not a member of the Glendora community whereas I am a member of the Westmont community.

This point is made because the model is utilizing perspectives of liberation thought and must stay true to the theory. The same people must engage both parts of the action-reflection model of liberation theology. The action of the model grows directly out of the reflection and therefore if the action is true to the fabric of the community then so too must be the reflection.

The parts of community exegesis that can be undertaken here, on the outside looking in, are the quantitative tools. We can gather the evidence that gives us insight into the ethnic diversity and socio/economic status of the community as opposed to the ethnicity and economic status of the congregation. These numbers show that the population of Anglos (77.3%) far outnumbers the next group (Hispanics at 15.7%). The only group projected to decrease, however, over the next five years is the Anglos and every other ethnic group, including African-American, Hispanic, Asian and Native American, will increase. The socio/economic numbers will change as well. Currently the average household income is \$93,319. Over the next five years as the ethnicity changes, the average age lowers, the number of single-family households increases and the number of college graduates decreases (all expected changes) in the community, the socio/economics will most likely change as well. The average household income will



probably grow closer to the national average of \$61,904.<sup>7</sup> One thing made clear by this simple exegesis is that the surrounding community is far more diverse than those sitting in the pews Sunday mornings.

The projections show that the diversity of the community in ethnicity and economics will increase over the next decade. This is indeed a pivotal time in the life of this congregation to begin exploring new models of religious education that facilitate a movement towards a multicultural church. This congregation has an opportunity to do now what the Westmont church failed to do twenty years ago. This is one of the reasons why projects like this one are so important today. Many churches like Westmont may be too weak, in financial and human resources, to revitalize themselves now; however, there are many churches in Southern California similar to Glendora. These churches are still strong and have the resources to transform their models now in order to serve a more multicultural community in the future.

This church must begin now the exegesis that cannot be accomplished here on the outside. They must examine within their stories the reality of the community. The ice cream man may not drive through the pastor's sermons but there are other stories that reveal deep truths about who the community is. There are certainly truths deep within the stories of the many families who utilize the church's day care five days a week but never attend the church on Sunday. There are deep truths within the stories of the many couples who are not church members but come to the church to celebrate their happiest day, marriage, never to return to the church again. There are deep truths within the stories of a million dollar renovation during which great divisions were created over

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<sup>7</sup> Percepts Group, Glendora, CA., 91741, 10 Basic Facts and 10 Race & Ethnicity Facts, 30 November 2001, on-line, available @ <http://www.link2lead.com/L2L/mycommunity>.

where to put windows and what color the carpet ought to be. The church must take the time now to pull out the meaning of the stories within the congregation and the larger community and begin to see how the community might best hear the Gospel proclamation.

### Action Following Reflection

Following the exegesis we must always return, as the liberation model begs, to action. Reflection is a good tool and is a healthy practice but praxis necessitates a response to the reflection. For example, in the book, Social analysis, Linking Faith and Justice, Joe Holland and Peter Henroit point out that the movement that began reflecting upon the systems of power in the Church in Latin America and how change can happen in institutions grew into the action that created the (Comunidades de Base) or Base Communities. These communities represent “a significant example of the restructuring of religious institutions.”<sup>8</sup> The power structures look very different than the old structures; more people are empowered and change occurs easier as the necessity arises. This powerful movement throughout much of Latin America began as a reflection upon the power structures of the Church. Just as in this example, action must follow reflection. When Glendora truly reflects upon the reality of dissonance between the ethnicity and economics of their congregation as compared to their community they must act. When they discover the truths in the stories of the day-care families and matrimonial visitors, they must act – that is, if they desire to engage the spiritual lives of these people. How they do this acting is not up to this project to proclaim, nor the outside Church consultant.

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<sup>8</sup> Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), 44.

It is unique to the gifts and graces of the people who already call themselves members of that spiritual community.

I cannot tell how Glendora ought to act, but I can give a glimpse into how Westmont has acted upon their reflection of community exegesis. As I do so remember that while it is all action directly linked to the reflections of community exegesis there is another form of reflection underneath the action. These reflections are the biblical and theological reflections outlined in chapter two. Simultaneous with the exegesis of the community, the preaching and teaching within the congregation has encompassed the ideas of chapter two. The congregation has consistently been brought back to reflection upon the Pauline Christians as they encountered the multiculturalism of the Greco/Roman world.

As Westmont began to look at the truths of the stories in their community, such as the ice cream man, they also looked carefully at the quantitative realities of the community. Both forms of this information were shared and considered at the formal and informal gatherings of the church community for some time while also considering what possibilities the congregation had to act upon these reflections given their resources. I remember early on a break through moment, when at one gathering I had placed the quantitative evidence before the majority of the congregation and just let them look at it without making any comments of my own. After a few moments of silence, a long time elderly Anglo member finally broke the silence with the statement, "Well, this (the ethnic, economic and generational profile of the surrounding community) is certainly not us." A long silence followed and shortly thereafter the congregation in earnest began to transform their ways of ministry in order to put themselves in a position to proclaim the

Gospel to these people who were “different” from them. This transformation has happened in a number of ways over the past couple years:

- There were some intentional times of developing a vision for what the church could and ought to be in this community and what we had learned so far that the community might desire in a church. In terms of discussions between people of faith we were attempting to, “discern what God was calling us to be in this community.” These times together led to the creation of a statement which has since been put in the forefront of the congregations consciousness and informed our communal life. The statement is: *Westmont Church is a home for all people, providing the help you need, and the hope for abundant life in Jesus Christ.* It is a simple statement and general, but it gives the congregation a common vision and a way to check themselves when making decisions.
- One of the first questions we had to ask following this time of vision creation was a question of Stewardship. The church embarked on a campaign to assure that the financial resources of the congregation were cared for in such a way that we were able to move toward creating opportunities for inviting people to make the church their home, helping people in concrete ways when they were in need and creating new ministries which allowed for people to come into contact with the proclamation of the Gospel. This also went beyond our financial resources and reached into the stewardship of our space. We had previously been renting space to groups outside of the community and while this was a service to these groups and the financial gain for the congregation was helpful, we learned that this use of space hindered our service to our community and therefore the vision of the

church we had received. After some time we were able to break these lease agreements and use our space in ways that served to live out our vision.

- Through our exegesis of the community we discovered that the community did not know that the church was active and did not feel served by the church at all, despite the fact that most lived within one mile of the church and all the children of the community went to school directly across the street. In order to combat this and simply to meet our neighbors better, we began holding events for children and families in the park across the street. These events were free for the community and sometimes organized solely by the church and other times in conjunction with the local community center. We celebrated the beginning of the school year, the beginning of the summer and the two most important Christian Holidays, Christmas and Easter, with these events in the park. At these events church members were always present and able to have conversations with people of the community which served to further help us exegete the community and also make sure people felt invited to join us at the church. Over the course of these events we met many children and their families and were able to begin relationships with them and with the community in general.<sup>9</sup>
- After some time we returned back to the original vision statement that we had created in the beginning as a time of reflecting on the new information we had learned about our community. This is typical of the liberation model in that just

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<sup>9</sup> These relationships were not necessarily in the church. The families, in fact, did not join or for the most part even visit the church's worship service. The established relationships were very informal and might include a short conversation when passing one another on a walk, or a conversation at another community event, or a cup of coffee in one another's home. The relationships are an attempt to exchange stories with our neighbors. These relationships also plant seeds of trust which is a necessity if groups from various backgrounds are going to enter into community with one another.

as reflection begs for action, action in turn begs for more reflection. This cycle is always ongoing and we practiced that as we revisited the original statement. At that time we decided that we ought to consider a particular emphasis in order to be more specific about how to act upon the vision statement. The congregation decided on two particular places of emphasis.

- We would focus our ministries to reach out to families with children. We knew that this was the most concentrated group within our community and the group that had been most active in the events to date. We decided that we would have some very intense short-term summer programs that engage the children and always include one family night at the end of each of these short-term programs. In the long run we would reach out to these families by developing a Children's Center in our Education Building which could provide day care, nursery school, after school programs, parenting classes, etc., which we learned were all lacking in the community.
- This emphasis was intentionally outward focused so the congregation also decided to focus some energy inside on ourselves with more education of the members in general faith issues so that they might feel more equipped to answer questions of faith when they encountered people in the community. Developing this focus forced the congregation to admit that they could not be all things to all people and helped them to utilize human and financial resources toward this common emphasis. This was helpful

because in all conversations we were able to ask ourselves the question:

does the current topic of conversation serve our emphasis?

- To our delight the intense summer ministries were well received by the community and we were able to learn from the children and families more about them, their strengths and their needs. Given this information we again returned to a time of reflection and are now developing programs which the community is asking for: English as a Second Language courses in the evenings, a Spanish Language Bible Study and a Wednesday after school program so the children have activities on the day that they get out of school early every week.
- Another significant transformation that is currently happening in the congregation at this time of writing, grew out of reflections on the biblical witness and community exegesis. This has to do with the forms of leadership that the church employed. In self-examination we learned that the church was very hierarchical in nature, when it comes to leadership styles. The Pastor was essentially the initiator of nearly everything and a few lay leaders were in positions that carried tremendous power as well as the requirement for having been a member for years and years. Our biblical education also gave us examples of how leaders, like Paul, would travel to many places creating new ministries and empowering new leaders to rise up and care for those ministries. These reflections carried a number of implications in our multicultural setting: the common church person was not empowered by the church to follow their own personal sense of calling within the vision of the ministry. As new people came into the church, likely to

be of an ethnicity other than Anglo, they would be sent the message that they could follow the lead of the long time dominant Anglo leaders. As we learned more about our neighbors and the cultural heritage of their ethnicity we also found that many of them were more communal in their decision making processes rather than hierarchical. This was a difficult reality for us, but we knew that if we were going to be a multicultural church where people felt engaged in their faith journey we had to transform our styles of leadership. The new model is one where the Pastor is no longer the initiator of ministries but rather facilitates individuals and groups in initiating the ministries which they feel led to be a part of, given these ministries' fit within the visions of the larger church. Now rather than one leader of all ministries, there are numerous leaders directing teams of people in ministries. These teams are very flexible for people to join as they discover which ministries they would like to take part in. The decisions of the congregation are no longer made by the long time traditional Anglo members, who were the only ones with the knowledge of the church structure to be able to hold those positions, but now the decisions will be made in concert with the Team leaders and the teams, the people who are actively engaged in carrying out the vision of the church. This has been well received by the newer members, who now feel like they have a part in the ministry, and the older members as well, who now feel like they do not have everything riding on their shoulders. One of the goals of this leadership transformation is to create an institution that is more porous and can change as the community changes and is open to the new ways of ministry that the future in a multicultural community necessitates.



All of these actions grow directly out of our reflection upon the biblical witness and what we have exegeted from our community. It is obvious in a number of the actions that this is not a master plan of five or ten years that was conceived in the very beginning. This is a process of reflecting and then acting and then reflecting upon the results of the prior action and acting again. If there is a master plan at all, it is to be engaged in this process over time. As these actions are written here they seem like they all worked perfectly and this is some sort of utopia where all ideas are good and lead to terrific results. I assure you at Westmont this is not the case. We have made faulty reflections that led to failures where nobody showed up to a planned event, where there was conflict over the chosen action and where more problems were created than solved. For example, we are in one of these mid-course changes during the writing of this text. We have learned that the kids in our community are extremely excited and fulfilled by the programming we have done and would enjoy more of the same types of activities. We have also found that the parents are particularly pleased with the high level of adult interaction that the children receive in our programs. Given these learnings we offered an after-school program on the weekly short day in the local school district. We mailed about 150 bilingual advertisements with a sign up form and a self addressed stamped envelope to return the form in. We received no responses; through in the community we heard discussion of the program. We took this to mean that the community wanted the program but were uncomfortable with the paper heavy registration. Our response to all this is that we developed a program in which we will take off campus and onto the street corners where the kids hang out after school. The program is essentially the same as it would have been at the church campus. The community desires the program, although

for whatever reason they don't feel comfortable registering for it to happen on the church campus – so we will take it to their campus, the streets. This is also a part of the process; we learn this from our biblical witness as well. Remember that Peter was not thrilled to be taking the Gospel message to the Gentiles, the Council was not in agreement over how to follow the directive of Jesus, the new ministries created such as Corinth encountered trials of their own. What is intrinsic in all of these examples is that the people were open to reflecting upon what the directive from Jesus to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth meant for them, who their community was and what the best ways were for helping their community understand what the Gospel.

## CHAPTER 4

### A Multicultural Perspective

It would be nice and incredibly helpful if there were a book out there that could successfully teach us a model for developing churches in multicultural communities. This project certainly has hinted at some possible directions in this work; this project, however, will stop short of suggesting a particular model. Models suggest that there is one particular way to accomplish a goal, such as a way to put the model plane together or a way to look in the clothes as the model does. A model suggests boundaries of right and wrong that can be easily measured against the directions or expectations. As a religious educator who utilizes liberation theology, I recognize that praxis will be solely dependent upon the communities in question and each community will develop its own goals of praxis. So, rather than suggesting a model, this chapter will give some perspectives from which to approach multicultural issues in the Church and community.

This project has dealt with these perspectives chapter by chapter and in this final chapter they will be put together as a holistic approach. These perspectives will be entertained in each community in a different way according to the approaches that are best suited for the individual community. For example, the Westmont Church would best encounter the community in the park across the street from the church which itself is not in the best condition, but the Glendora Church seeking the same interaction would best be served to invite the community to their church which is newly renovated. The methods are flexible but exegesis, reflection and action are a necessity in any church that considers itself dynamic, and especially a church that finds itself amidst a changing neighborhood.

A reader familiar with multicultural religious education will notice a similarity presented here to the models that Robert Pazmino advocates.<sup>1</sup> This is a simple model when compared to others in the field, but simplicity does not reflect lack of thoughtfulness or ease of implementation. Pazmino suggests two educational movements that are equally important and necessary. The first is, “that of emphasizing one’s ethnic identity and definition.”<sup>2</sup> The second is, “that of seeking a common ground for community, for life in a global village grappling with the realities of ethnic and cultural identity.”<sup>3</sup> Pazmino says that this model both acknowledges one’s identity and heritage while entering a quest for universality. The perspectives presented here have used different language, but one can see in Pazmino’s model the importance of understanding your story (the biblical proclamation) and understanding the community, coupled with reflection upon these learnings and action which transforms the once mono-cultural Church into a multicultural Church.

### Exegesis

The first step to transformation of a church must be an understanding of the current location. Implied in the liberation model of theology is a period of understanding that precedes reflection, there must be something to reflect upon. Too often we embark on a project without understanding the true dynamics of our current system. This can only lead to further frustration, since effort was employed and yet the original problems remain. In a sense we are talking about a systems-approach to this transformation. A

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Pazmino, “Double Dutch: Reflections of an Hispanic North American on Multicultural Religious Education,” in Voces: Voices from the Hispanic Church, ed. Justo L. Gonzales (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 145.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid..

Church is a set of dynamics all interacting with one another and with the larger community. Transformative action must grow out of an understanding of these systems. For example, Edwin H. Friedman, in his book Generation to Generation, deals with individuals and institutions in this systems approach. He points out that all people and organizations are tied into relationships and in order for growth to come to the individual, they must understand the dynamics of these relationships. In a sense they can only grow as much as their relationships will allow. Friedman applies this to religious groups, pointing out relationships within the group or between the group and other groups will dictate how the group changes. This can easily be seen; if the members of a church think a certain style of worship will appeal to the community but the community does not agree, the worship will obviously not succeed. This is a system that the church must understand in order for the work of transforming mono-cultural churches into multicultural churches to be successful.

### **The Biblical Exegesis**

The first issue to understand, or to “exegete,” as the word has been used here, is the work of chapter two, the biblical and theological principles that the Church upholds. This is perhaps the most neglected area of understanding for the Church today, specifically for the United Methodist Church. William J. Abraham accuses the Church of this in his book, Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia. He says that the UMC has essentially forgotten what was once so important to it and this is the primary downfall of the Church. In fact it will be the mark of death if the Church does not correct this problem now. In both of the churches utilized in this project, the vast majority of members do not take part in the weekly Bible studies available in the two religious communities. Possibly an even

greater percentage do not take the time to personally study the Bible. This is a problem when the Christian Story is communicated primarily through the Bible. How is reflection upon the story supposed to happen if the story is not known? This perspective advocating transformation in churches that discover themselves as mono-cultural amidst a multicultural community must begin with an understanding of the multicultural issue as early Christians faced it in the New Testament.

Chapter 2 gives one account of this biblical and theological heritage. The hope of this project is that the two churches identified, as well as others, will be able to access this foundation as a starting point for understanding themselves. The chapter shows both sides of the argument, the mission to Jerusalem and the mission to the Gentiles, and paints a picture of the problem. Then, utilizing the resources of Greek science and philosophy and the movements of Acts, new theological understandings are pointed out that took root in the communities of Paul. Understanding of this portion of the Christian proclamation could be tremendously helpful to churches struggling to transform before they die. This is not a short-term Bible study to be completed in three weeks; it is a long-term teaching of specific scriptural passages and general theological ideas. This biblical and theological perspective must be conveyed in the classroom, from the pulpit, in the prayer group, in the newsletter and anywhere else that the biblical teachers of the congregation have a voice. Though the specific format is not proposed here, it can be adapted for the purpose of the particular church.

### The Church Exegesis

This exegesis of the biblical proclamation harkens back to Pazmino's model that asserts, one movement ought to be understanding and affirming one's own identity. This

is certainly what is being proposed here. We must remind ourselves that our faith story is a definitive part of who we are as individuals and a Church so we must learn it. Another part of our heritage that we must identify is that of being the Church. As a local congregation, before transformation takes place, we must answer the questions that lie within the stories of our congregations. The stories of a congregation give clear answers to questions such as: What is most important to this congregation? What is the goal of the congregation? What is the vision of the congregation? For example, during one summer month just after a pastoral change that was very devastating to the church, Westmont chose not to pay its denominational financial obligations in favor of cutting down a tree that was dying (but had been for ten years and was not in imminent danger of falling). The congregation was angry at the denomination, had lost trust and respect for the leadership, and was hurt by the recent change of local clergy. This denial of outside authority showed that at that time the focus of the congregation was very inward. Most important to the congregation was themselves -- surviving the hurt and maintaining their safe community. Right or wrong, this is part of who they were at that time. In order for us to understand our congregations we must ask questions of ourselves, such as: where is the money spent, where is the time spent, what do we expect our clergy to focus on, what are the characteristics we expect of our lay leaders, etc. We also must ask the bigger questions of the past about how our local church or denomination or Christendom itself has participated in the world. Have we been oppressors at various times of ethnic groups that now live in our community? Have we been involved in political issues or debate that would be offensive to particular groups of people? Have we been a movement of one

group or another, exclusive of some? Answers to these very difficult questions help us understand ourselves, and our effects upon others.

It will be tremendously helpful for the church amidst this work to have a healthy understanding of themselves, both those things well perceived and otherwise. As mentioned above, this work is dealing with systems. The more of our systems that we can understand, the quicker we will be able to deal with issues as they arise in the transformation. For example, if a large number of the members in the mono-cultural church were children of the Great Depression, then financial issues, especially risks that are taken to reach out to the neighborhood, will be possible places of conflict. At the moment of conflict, if one does not understand the heritage of the congregation, then the conflict may be attributed to something else and the underlying financial issues ignored, which in the end solves very little. We cannot, obviously, understand every dynamic at play in our congregation; there will be surprises and there will be failures at dealing with these surprises. A good exegesis of oneself, however, will prove helpful, especially when conflict arises.

### **The Community Exegesis**

To many of us in the dominant culture it has been easy to define our heritage in the Church because our heritage is the Church's heritage and vice versa. The Church as we know it has helped us understand our story very well because it is our story. We have been in power, we have constructed the Church as it fits our needs and our voices have been heard from the pulpits, classrooms, theology books, ecumenical councils and denominational hierarchies. This is fine and a part of the necessary process, but others need to be heard as well. We must move to a place where everyone is able to tell their



stories and where there is shared experience. The master narrative, the story that encompasses all people, has been the narrative of the “master” and not of the people. It is time to hear and understand the community, especially if the community is different from the church members.

This issue was dealt with at length in chapter three and many perspectives and tools were displayed so that they might be adapted to any local church setting. It may seem obvious to listen to the surrounding community of a church, but sometimes the stories of the community have been absent because they have been ignored by the church. As the church tells its story to a community, the church must allow for the stories of the community to be told as well. The only way to exegete, to understand, the community, is to allow, empower and invite them to speak. Too often, the Gospel proclamation is offered or even forced on someone without ever allowing for the someone to tell their story. The proclamation made by the Gospel is truly a conversation between the believers and the culture in which they live. Paul and his followers certainly allowed for the culture to speak to them and with this information they were able to construct a Gospel that the culture could understand. This is difficult: it was for Peter as he struggled with his first call to go to the Gentiles, it was for the Jerusalem Council and it will be for any church and its members. This means that those in power and with voice have to step aside long enough to let the others be heard. They must be heard in the fullness of their traditions that may eclipse language barriers and encompass dance, art, drama and other forms of communication. This means that the Church very well might transform and be different than what we are currently comfortable with. It also means that the Church cannot be a place where once or twice a year the voice of the “other” is

heard, but a place where every day the voice of all is heard. Obviously, the group in control will lose its control, but must have the foresight to understand they will gain spiritual depth in the end. This act sees the church beginning to exegete the neighborhood in which it is placed.

It is easy to identify a church that is attempting to exegete its community because the members are in the community, not cloistered behind the walls of the church. John Kretzmann and John McKnight in their work advocate that the Church has to be a part of the other institutions in the neighborhood in order to gain power in numbers.<sup>4</sup> What is more important than power in numbers, are the relationships that are forged between the church and those in the neighborhood outside of the church. The church in cooperation with institutions will be forced to hear the other leaders of these institutions which are often more reflective of the neighborhood – schools, community groups, government groups, etc. The church will begin to amass a wonderful collection of stories from within the community about how the community views themselves, what is important in the community, where the community wants to go – this is the work of exegesis and understanding upon which to build.

If we desire to develop multicultural churches then we must first gain the perspective of exegesis. We must endeavor to gather as much understanding about the biblical story, our own history as a church and the history of the larger community. We cannot expect a transformed church to grow out of the rubble of ignorance, isolation and denial. We can, however, build a foundation of understanding upon which the transformation begins.

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<sup>4</sup> John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, Building Communities from the Inside Out (Evanston, Ill: Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, 1993), 171-72.

### Reflection

Once again we return to the liberation model and reflection. Reflection follows the first perspective of exegesis or the gaining of knowledge. There was knowledge taken from three different aspects: biblical, personal and communal. A time of intense reflection will be the time to assimilate and begin forming reactions to this information. You can see that these perspectives are not new insights; it is simply the application of a form of liberation theology to a certain aspect of church life. You can also see that this is not a quick process. One does not come in and systematically undertake each type of exegesis and move directly to reflection; it is a much more porous movement. It is a movement in and out of proclaiming one's own story and listening to another's story. If, as in Pazmino's model, we will begin to eventually make room for commonality, then we have to take the time to understand where the stories are common. This reflection is important in each of the ways that information was gathered in the first perspective.

### Reflections Upon Biblical Study

One of the reasons why there has been a loss of biblical literacy and a lack of study demonstrated in both of these congregations, and I believe throughout Methodism, if not larger in scope, is because we have lost our ability to reflect upon Scripture. This is evident when we consider who the members of the United Methodist Church are and who represents Christendom in general. We are primarily a movement of the older generation. This is obvious to an observer of those who fill the pews every Sunday in the majority of UM Churches throughout the country. This lack of reflection is not the fault of these members; it begins in our churches when our children reach adolescence. We are setting our children up for failure and loss of membership at this early age. Consider

for a moment: in Church we educate children in very literal ways that their minds can imagine and they hear the stories of a powerful and loving God. This pedagogy is very successful with young children and the Church is full of children. As these children grow into adolescents, their minds begin to change and they gain the ability to think abstractly.<sup>5</sup> During these years they learn to ask questions as a model for their own education. They ask questions of the math problem, of the science experiment, of the logic of a basketball play, etc. Their minds are seeking to put the very concrete learnings of a child into an abstract world. It is at this very time in their development when I have experienced the UMC losing members.

In both Conferences where I have been employed and in close contact with youth and young adults, I have seen trends of strong ministry to children and young adolescents. These large numbers have always dwindled by the time the kids got to late high school and college years. It is not a coincidence that these numbers decrease just as abstract thinking in the child is increasing. The world, especially educational institutions, are teaching these young people to question everything and think abstractly about the world. This is precisely the opposite pedagogical model the kids are learning in Church. For some reason, perhaps because we cannot, do not think our young people can handle it, do not trust them with the information or do not want the information ourselves, we have not invited the young people in the Church to think abstractly about and question their faith. We expect them to continue seeing visions of Jonah and the Whale, and not to ask questions about passages such as, “blessed are you who are poor” (Luke 6:20b). While they are experiencing a world that is anything but literal, we have stuck to the

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<sup>5</sup> A good treatment of this subject as it applies to faith issues can be found in James Fowler, Weaving the New Creation (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 91-116. Another perspective is from Erick Erikson, Childhood and Society (New York: Norton, 1950).

ultra-literal teachings of their third grade Sunday school. We have not taught them to reflect upon the Scripture and as they have grown older, the Scriptures have simply become obsolete in their lives. So they leave the Church and only when they have the driving force of children that they feel they must raise in the Church do they return. Even then, they do not have the ability or permission to reflect seriously on the Scriptures.

Biblical study, like that in chapter two, without reflection is void of purpose. The study answers the questions of what happened when Paul or Jesus or the Good Samaritan was alive, but without reflection we cannot answer the question of what that has to do with our lives. What does it mean for you that Peter was apparently awakened by God to the issue of multiculturalism in Acts 10? Could God awaken you to this issue or some other issue that you had been directly opposed to before? What will you do when and if God does awaken you? Will you do like Peter and, though frightened and reluctant, follow the command of God? Or, will you ignore God and pretend not to hear the call? These questions are about the current generations of Christians and are not found in the text itself. The answers are found in the reflections that we make upon the text and what the text is saying to us.

There are some important questions to ask which grow out of chapter two. Our reflection upon these types of questions and others like them take us beyond the first and second century Church and lay a foundation for how we might understand our current situation as a local mono-cultural church amidst a multicultural community. Greek philosophy taught Paul and his followers that there was a dualism between body and soul, that our souls have no ethnicity or gender, that we are to care for the things of the soul and that our soul comes from God and God will take us back upon our death, if we can

manage to keep our soul pure. This is exactly opposite from the Deuteronomistic understanding of life, practiced in the Old Testament.<sup>6</sup> In this understanding what is important is land, homes, wealth, children, power, prestige – this sounds very much like our world and more and more like the Church. Reflection upon this understanding might lead us to feel the dissonance between what we in the Church spend our time and money on and what Paul's understanding would lead us to. We might have to ask ourselves if we are living more in the Deuteronomistic way of life, caring for our possessions, improving them, caring for our body, separating ourselves by gender and ethnicity, rather than spending our time caring for our soul, seeing the unity of one to another, and focusing our attention on that moment when we might escape this body and unite with God.

Reflection upon chapter two might lead us to reflect upon whom the *people of God* really are. The old definition would have been the people of Israel. This definition was constructed within a worldview that the world was very small and in fact God was very small. But, Greek science changed this understanding of the world. Now the world was vast and if God was the creator then God must be vast as well. If God was vast, then God could surely could not be in the center of the Temple in Israel, God must be somewhere out there overlooking all people. The *people of God* became all people. Do we make concessions in our church to be sure that all people are welcome – language, style, time, finance, etc., or are the *people of God* the people who do Church just like you? Paul had to make concessions about some traditions that he had practiced his whole life concerning circumcision and purity laws in order to welcome the Gentiles in, who did not practice those rituals. These were surely sacred rituals to Paul, but not sacred enough

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<sup>6</sup> See Deuteronomy 28.

to keep Paul from giving them up in order to be able to say, “welcome” to the Gentiles. Is today’s Church holding sacred to some things that disable us from saying, “welcome” to the “Gentile” of today’s world?

Jesus seemed to break all the laws: he accepted water from the Samaritan woman, he sat with the Syrophonecian woman and even healed her daughter, he ate with the sinners, he cleansed the lepers, etc., etc. He broke all the rules and took wrath from nearly everyone for doing so. He did not let this wrath or judgment, alter what was Truth – these people, all of them, are the children of God and knew the grace of God through his ministry. Is the Church today doing enough to take wrath or are we staying out of trouble? Is the Church today bold enough to say and act as Jesus did, reminding the world that all people are the children of God and deserve to know God’s grace through the ministry of the Church? Or is the Church more comfortable with social gatherings, potlucks and sing-a-longs that never seem to draw the wrath of anyone?

These may not be the questions that you draw out of the understandings of chapter two. For each community there will be different understandings and therefore different questions and even different reflections. What is important is that each community learns the Christian Story of the text and takes the time to reflect and consider what that story says to them in their context.

### Reflections Upon the Church and Community

Here the understandings of church and community are combined. It is important to take the exegesis of the community and the exegesis of the church and to look at them in concert with one another. This facilitates the ability to see the places of common existence and the places of stark dissonance. Certainly there must be reflection on each

topic independent of one another, but for this work it is important eventually to integrate the information.

The church must be intentional about this integration in the future, especially if the church is in settings where the community is vastly different from the members. The church must be reflecting simultaneously upon who they are and who the community is. The mono-cultural church in a multicultural community will experience the dissonance between the two stories. The church and community may have very different stories of education, family, finance, faith tradition, etc., and this will be a difficult place for the church to find itself. Nonetheless, the church must see, hear and reflect upon these unfamiliar stories. Similar to Christine Sleeter's educational model in academia, the church must work to reposition its perspective by allowing other perspectives to be heard first.<sup>7</sup> Sleeter took her students out of the classroom and out of their own world and into the experiences of the oppressed.

In the same way this model only works if the Church is outward focused. We often talk of the outward focus of the Church as evangelism, but this is not enough. Sleeter was persistent in pushing her students outside of their communities and into the perspective of the "other." She did this through a five step pedagogical model which included: graphic portrayals of inequality in which students encountered the gross stories of inequality; instruction in "minority position" perspective in which students analyzed the previous stories on organizational, personal and symbolic levels for oppression; reflective writing in which students interacted on a personal level with the previous two pedagogical steps; tapping into sources that bring minority position perspectives into

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<sup>7</sup> Christine E. Sleeter, "Reflections on My Use of Multicultural and Critical Pedagogy When Students Are White," in Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference, ed. Christine E. Sleeter and Peter L. McLaren (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 422-23.



view; and finally, collective knowledge production where students took all of the knowledge gained in the pedagogical model to pose a solution to the problem addressed. Of this model Sleeter writes, "Multicultural teaching is not simply a list of teaching strategies. Rather, it is orientation to listening to oppressed peoples, including scholars, with the aim of learning to hear and understand what is being said, building dialogue, and learning to share decision-making power with oppressed communities."<sup>8</sup>

Keeping this pedagogical model in mind, we turn back to the idea of evangelism -- in most evangelism the Church is going out and bringing people back without hearing their experience and rarely incorporating the stories of the outsiders into the story of the Church. The focus of the outward Church needs to be on swapping stories with the people of the neighborhood. This means both sharing your story and allowing others to share theirs, perhaps allowing them to share first. The experience of the Church needs to be one where there is never a finished story, but there is always an ongoing creation of the story. The biblical witness of the creation story was that after seven days the creation was over, but the reality of God's people was that those seven days were the beginning of the work of a creative God. God continues to bring new life in every situation, to lead the people into new lands and into new understandings. In light of this, the Church should be the same, never finished with the story but always searching for additions. The focus of the Church ought to be outward rather than inward; that way the Church can hear how the people out there experience the world which God created.

As was pointed out in chapter three, this reflection will lead to a discovery of the truths within the church and community. It is important to place these truths next to one another and discover the areas where they agree and where they collide. We will

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 432-33.

certainly find differences in our story when we are dealing with multiple groups of people, but to our surprise we will also discover common places of reality. For example, when this integration was practiced in Westmont, many of the older women who once said, "All these young women of different socio/economic classes, ethnic groups and sometimes even languages are so different than us that we cannot even relate to them," discovered otherwise. At numerous events designed to put these two groups of people together, the older Anglo women of the church and the younger women in the community, the two groups discovered that there was common experience and truth in their realities. The young women expressed their struggles of raising children and the uncertainties, fears, joys, etc., that go along with being the primary child care person in the home. This was their reality because they were either: a family broken by divorce, a family in which the father spent the majority of his time at a low wage job, or a family from an ethnic heritage that placed the role of the woman in the home with the children. This struggle was the exact experience that the older Anglo women had in the forties, fifties and sixties when they were raising their children. As the conversations progressed between the two groups, they began to understand that deep within their stories there were common truths, and upon this reflection they acted in the form of support and care for one another.

When we reposition ourselves, we will see in the stories of others truths that are reflected in our own stories. For each community there will be different truths, but there may also be some common issues that we will see in all stories. In the work in my context, both in Westmont and Glendora, I have been fortunate to work with a large span of groups of people: from rich to poor, established to newly immigrated, Anglo to several

other ethnic groups, educated to uneducated, and many other spectrums of divisions we may put between groups of people. In all of the stories represented in these groups there have been many differences in the way that these groups have experienced the reality of this world. Obviously, for the richer ones the world has been a kinder place and for the poorer ones the reality is harsher. Amidst all of the differences that lay between these people, the stories have lifted out some truths that remain constant between each of the groups. As I have lived with and researched in these communities, three truths have arisen as common places of reality. These realities may have come to the surface because they were on the forefront of my own mind, because they were intrinsic to these particular communities or because they are truths that all humans seek. This project is not concerned with the universal truths of all humans, but rather the truths that are intrinsic in your context as an individual and the actions that you undertake knowing these truths.

The common threads of the stories that I heard throughout my work were a desire for safety, a longing for community and the need to understand one's purpose. Erickson, of course, would agree, but it will be helpful for us to think about these needs in light of the current topic.<sup>9</sup> People from the rich side of the tracks or the poor will both understand the need for safety, though in different ways, as will the young people going to school and the old people living by themselves. This is a basic need for humanity. The key to understanding this issue as it is presented in this perspective is to recognize the common experience of needs. We could argue that each community will fulfill these needs in diverse ways, which is true, but the emphasis of this perspective is not the particulars but rather the common experiences of humanity.

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<sup>9</sup> Erickson, 219-23.

The next need, that of community, will perhaps be the most important aspect in developing a multicultural church. The need varies given the circumstance, but a newly immigrated family or individual, the single thirty-something, the new parents, the parents who just sent off their child to college, the elderly couple whose kids and grandkids moved for a promotion and, I would argue, all others will express a need for community. This ought to be dealt with easily by the Church, if the Church is the center of the community. Yet this has been a struggle for the Church. A good example of this struggle are the places where the desire for community has been expressed by numerous groups and the result has been one Church building hosting four or five various ethnic ministries who are really separate entities from one another. In many cases the Church missed an opportunity to capitalize on the common need of community, instead choosing to maintain ethnic diversity.

The third common aspect that I discovered was a need to understand one's purpose. This is obviously an issue for young people, but can be found amidst a single parent who has spent a lifetime raising children who are now gone, amidst a family whose bread winner lost a job, amidst a newly retired person's struggle and other places when we listen. It is obvious that these are not explicitly ethnic issues; they are human issues, and it is time for the Church to look beyond, without ignoring, the ethnicity and to see the human.

The reflections are examples of what is expected when we put the stories of the Church and the surrounding community together. Upon reflection we see that though there may be vast differences between the groups of people we are working with, there are some common truths about their realities. It is upon the reflection of these truths that

the multicultural Church can be constructed. The culture of the church, the way the church expresses what is important to them, is in direct response to the common issues raised rather than in response to each individual group, which in the end will always result in the dominant groups culture being uplifted. Of course, as the perspective is presented here, it seems idealistic. A community who clearly articulates their stories, listens to one another, and exegetes a common experience easily would be hard to find. That is precisely why this perspective advocates for a continual process of reflection and action. The process continues over and over until these common truths are defined. One is reminded of “community discernment” in the Quaker tradition. The community gathers in silence and when one discerns the will of God that person speaks; the process continues until all agree on the discernment. This could be one hour or one week. A process of discovering common truths in a diverse community will not come easily or be void of hard work. The hope that pushes a community forward into this difficult work is that people are continuing to engage one another in the process.

### Action

Though action is the final movement presented here, it is necessary to remember that when working with the liberation model of praxis, reflection and action cohabitate. They are practiced together in a system that is not linear but cyclical, with constant reflection and action. This is not a model with an end; every community will continue to change and a church that wants to reflect these changes must continue to reflect and act appropriately. Sometimes these reflections lead to big changes in the institution, such as the leadership change that was described at the Westmont Church in Chapter 3. Sometimes the reflections will lead to small changes such as the one I made as the clergy

at Westmont Church, where we were hearing stories of many people who had left the Catholic Church. As a result, I ceased wearing a liturgical robe in worship because it was very reminiscent of the Catholic Church, which for one reason or another these people had left. These are also two good examples to remind the reader that the actions taken in each church will vary depending on the particular reflections that are made in that context:

Though the particular action will vary, the action will always grow out of the reflections upon the exegetical information from that community. Chapter 2 gave us insight into how two communities of Christians dealt with their particular contexts in the first century. One reflection that the contemporary Church can share with both of these communities is upon the Acts text, “and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8). If our reflection leads us to see that we are included in this directive, then we must act. We cannot simply end with the notion that this is directed to us; the only way to be faithful to this reflection is to act in ways that will fulfill the responsibility we discover in the text.

In multicultural settings we can also learn from the reflections of the Pauline Christians. They began to understand that the world was a large place and if God was the creator, then God must be larger than the guy sitting on top of the dome and, therefore, cannot be contained in a temple or by a particular group of people. God was present for all people. A reflection upon this ought to lead us to action that transforms our everyday way of doing things to be more open to other people, especially those in the community who are not presently invited into the understanding of the *people of God*. Further reflection upon Chapter 2 might also lead us to act in ways that break down cultural

barriers, if we see truth in the understanding of the soul. Remember that the soul, not the bodily existence, is what became important to that group of Christians and they therefore began to break down the ways in which they had separated people based on bodily characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity and legal proscriptions.

The biblical study, reflections upon it and subsequent actions provide the foundation for this work. If a church does not understand themselves as the ones sent to the ends of the earth, even if that is their community, then there would be no impetus for transforming a mono-cultural church into a multicultural church that reaches the ends of their community. This tells the church that it is their responsibility to act. The theological growth from the text concerning who the people of God lays the foundations for who can be included in the Gospel proclamation. The reflections upon the soul give the church members a depth of understanding that helps them to begin seeing through the divisions that our culture invites us to hold against one another. We may not have a dream experience like Peter in the Acts 10 in which God tells us clearly and sends others to help us understand how we are to transform, but we do have the witness of the New Testament through which God guides us to this transformation. The biblical and theological witness ought to be the foundation for the Church as the struggle with issues of obsolescence in multicultural communities continues.

Upon this foundation we are able to act on the reflections of church and community. These actions bring us back to where we began, Maria, her friends and her question. The reflections gained from all the exegetical work must help us to answer her question,

How come I can sit with Sarah on the bus everyday except Thursday of course, and can help Brad with his math everyday except when I make him mad asking about the big brown spot behind his left ear, and can get in trouble with Sung for picking all of Mrs. Gertrude's pretty baby pink roses, and Tyrone and his sisters can come to my birthday party in the park in the summer and his sisters can even stay the night and tell ghost stories and Mr. Andebe can be my fifth grade teacher, even though I used to think he talked funny, but none of these people can go to church with us and I don't get to go to church with them?

The action of the Church must help her to not only answer this question but also eliminate the reason why kids in multicultural communities have to ask this question.

The action of the Church must result in a vision where Maria and the rest of her community, no matter what their level of diversity is, can experience the Church as the center of their community. It ought to be the place where Maria and others can both reflect their diversity and celebrate their common heritage as the *people of God*. Where once this was impossible to imagine, it can happen. It can happen if we let go of the old motifs of caring too much about the body and too little for the soul. The body and other material aspects of the world have been over-emphasized. If we are living with Paul's understanding of the soul, then we too will be able to say, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). And we can say this without devaluing the particular heritage of anyone in the Church. The Church can be a place where people can act upon their cultural heritage and others around them, who may not share the same heritage, but share their common soulful existence while not holding fast against the acts of heritage that are bodily representations of existence. It is possible for the Church in a multicultural community to be likeminded with the Jerusalem Council and say, "this way



**is okay for us, and that way is okay for them, because there is something more important than those physical barriers, our common identity as the *people of God*.”**

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